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SHORT SERMONS

FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR.

BY

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TRANSLATED, MODERNIZED, CONDENSED, ARRANGED, AND ADAPTED

BY

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First Sunday of Advent.

SUPERSTITION: ITS VARIETIES AND ITS MALICE.

"*There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.*"—Luke 21 : 25.

What are these signs in the heavens which shall cause men one day to wither away with fear? "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven." And what meaning shall these terrible signs convey to men? That the last day of the world is upon them, and that the Son of Man is about to judge the living and the dead. "And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven." But what connection is there between these signs and the end of the world, or the general judgment? When the sun was darkened long ago in Egypt, and again at the death of our Lord, nothing of the kind was portended. The moon and the stars often undergo various changes without any special significance being attached to it. While it is true that certain disturbances of the heavenly bodies have no power of themselves to betoken certain effects, yet divine revelation assures us that those changes of the planets which it foretells shall be a certain sign of the second coming of Christ. Hence, we must believe in those signs; and when men behold them, they shall have just cause to tremble with fear. Far different is it with those superstitious signs and practices which have become widely prevalent in our day, with those vain and foolish observations and divinations, and all the ridiculous efforts of modern soothsayers to produce certain effects by means that are utterly

inadequate. Oh, who will give me arms to combat these worse than follies of so many silly or ignorant people!

Let me now explain to you the varieties of this form of superstition, and the nature of its sin.

Countless are the superstitious practices now in vogue in nearly every land under the sun—each nation having its special abuses of this sort, as it has its particular language, dress, and manners. St. Augustine says of the converted Christians of his time, who still retained some relics of paganism: If two friends are walking together, and a stone falls, or a child, or a dog runs between them, they regard it as a sure sign that their friendship will soon be broken. If one sneezes when putting on his shoes in the morning, it is taken as a sign of an unlucky day, and he goes to bed again. He who stumbles on the threshold of the door going out, must go back at once, or else some misfortune will befall him. If a black dog runs into the house, it is a sign that some one in that house will soon die. If the salt-cellar is upset at table, something dreadful is sure to happen. These, and countless similar vain and and foolish observations, continues St. Augustine, are in vogue, and they are all sins of superstition, inventions of the devil, and relics of old heathenism and idolatry.

Are not the same vain observations prevalent among Christians nowadays? For instance, some people imagine that certain herbs have more virtue when plucked at night, at a certain hour, or on a certain feast. Others are afraid to undertake a journey on a certain day, or begin an important enterprise, say, on a Friday, under the impression that it would be unlucky to do so. From eggs laid on Holy Thursday (declare some of these simpletons) come forth fowl that change their color every year. Divide an onion (says another) into twelve parts on Christmas night, exactly on the stroke of twelve; place a pinch of salt on each part, giving it at the same time the name of one

of the months of the year: according as the salt melts or remains dry, it may be seen what months in the coming year will be dry or rainy. If you have a burning or a noise in your right ear, it is a sign that some dear friend is speaking or thinking of you; if in the left ear, it is a sign that some one is speaking ill of you. If thirteen sit down to table together, one of the company will die before the end of the year.

What foolish nonsense is all this! What connection can there possibly be between such signs, and the effects that are expected to follow them? For instance, if thirteen sit down to dinner, why should one of the guests die during the year? Why should not the same thing happen to thirteen horses or oxen that eat together in the same stable? Why not to thirteen Religious who live and eat together in the same convent the whole year round? It is all sheer nonsense. The advent of death is not brought about by any such combinations of numbers. It comes, as Christ tells us, when we least expect it. Hence, he warns us to be ready at all times to die.

There were once thirteen canons of a cathedral who resolved to show how groundless was this superstition of unlucky numbers. They resolved to sit down to table in spite of it, and enjoy themselves together. But one of them did not like to take the risks. "You are too daring," he said to the others; "if thirteen sit down together at table one is sure to die during the year. I will have nothing to do with it. You may do as you like, but I will stay at home!"

But, as it happened, the only one of the number who died during the year was the man who remained at home. Suppose, now, that he had been persuaded to join the others; would not his death have confirmed the old superstition? "He that feareth the Lord shall tremble at nothing, and shall not be afraid, for he is his hope," says the Holy Ghost; and "he who loves God," says St. Augustine, "will fear nothing in the world so much as to offend God by sin."

Again, there is the sinful folly of believing in dreams. For instance, if you dream that you have lost a tooth, the dream-reader will tell you that some one of your friends will soon die. If you dream of a fish, you are told that this also is a sign of death. The wise man speaks against these superstitious observations and calls them fancies of ignorant and foolish men: "The hopes of a man that is void of understanding are vain and deceitful; and dreams lift up fools. The man that gives heed to lying visions is like him that catcheth at a shadow, and followeth after the wind." And, again: "Deceitful divinations and lying omens, and the dreams of evildoers, are vanity.... Set not thy heart upon them, for dreams have deceived many, and they have failed who put their trust in them."

In the Old Law God expressly forbade believing in false dreams: "You shall not divine, nor observe dreams." But, it might be objected, there are many passages in the Sacred Scripture which show that the future is foretold in dreams that actually came true. Thus, Joseph of Egypt dreamt in his youth of his future exaltation, Pharaoh dreamt of the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine; Nabuchedonosor saw in his dream a tall tree, which prefigured the punishment of his sins, and in his dream of a statue, the succession of the four great monarchies; one of the Madianite soldiers prophesied Gideon's victory from a dream he had, and so on with many similar instances. Does it not follow, then, that there is often reason for believing in dreams, and what they portend really happens? To this I answer in the words of the Wise Man. After saying, "Set not thy heart upon them," he adds: "Except it be a vision sent forth from the Most High"—that is, unless God, for some important purpose, chooses to reveal something in a dream. All those dreams in the Holy Scripture that I have mentioned were in reality so many revelations from on high, and, as such, deserved to be believed in. It happens occasionally, too, in our own days, that God terrifies the sinner in a

dream, so that he may be inclined to immediate repentance. There is no doubt also that certain people have been privileged to see their dreams realized; but, ordinarily speaking, dreams are mere fancies—the result of disordered digestion—imaginary images pictured on the brain during sleep, which it would be a most superstitious and sinful folly to believe in.

Another foolish superstition is that which concerns the hour of one's birth. He who is born in a certain month, at a certain hour, under a certain constellation, will be happy all his life, while he who is born in a different month, at a different hour, will be unhappy. Now, what connection is there between these things? And yet there are people who believe so firmly in this nonsense that they allow it to miserably influence or even to shorten their very lives. A certain man, when on his death-bed, could not be induced to make his confession, because he believed, according to the chart of his nativity, that he had still a long time to live. Death, however, proved the prophecy to be a false one, for it came at once, and hurried his soul into eternity, and very probably into hell. A married woman once happened to read in a book on astrology belonging to her husband (which she had taken up through curiosity), that if a woman who was born on a certain day were to get married, she should die in child-bed. This made her so nervous that, although she had given birth to all her children without difficulty, she died during her next pregnancy through the effects of an over-excited imagination.

Such are some of the lamentable results of foolish superstitions.

But yet, it may be said, if it is superstitious to observe signs and constellations, then it is superstitious also for gardeners to consult the moon in sowing and planting, in cutting and pruning their trees. Superstitious also are those almanac-makers and weather prophets who foretell that it will be hot or cold, wet or dry on certain days. Ah, that is altogether a different

thing! Science assures us that the sun, the stars, and especially the moon, have received from their Creator a certain influence on earth, air and water and their products, and that they exercise that influence in a greater or less degree, according as they change their positions with regard to our elements. Therefore these observations of gardeners and weather prophets are not always superstitious, but are based on natural properties of bodies, and are warranted by experience, although they are not always to be implicitly relied upon.

Thirdly, superstition is practised by using certain means to discover hidden treasure. The best known of these is the divining rod. It is made of hazel wood, and, if carried about in the hand, is said to bend down of its own accord when it comes to a place in which there is water, gold, silver, or other metal hidden in the earth. The use of this rod is not superstitious, provided that no superstitious words or signs accompany its use, since the effect it produces seems to be within the limit of natural powers, and might be ascribed to some vapors ascending from the water or metal, which have a special sympathy for the hazel rod, just as the magnet attracts iron. Now, it is the general opinion of the learned that we must not ascribe to the devil an effect that can easily be attributed to the forces of nature, although we cannot exactly say how these forces operate. But if, when these rods are being cut, or used, certain words are pronounced, or circumstances are observed which have no natural power to help in producing the effect desired, there is no doubt that the whole business is tainted with superstition.

Are those observations and practices grievous sins? There is no doubt of it, unless in the case of inculpable ignorance. What sort of sins are they? Those who consult false prophets to get advice from them, and to be cured of their diseases, are guilty of asking help from the devil, and there is no doubt that they commit a grievous sin. The same is to be said of all other superstitious practices, because by them a secret contract is en-

tered into with the devil, the sworn enemy of God and man. This is clear; for, since those observations, signs and usages have no power of themselves, or from God or from the Church, to produce the effects intended, they must necessarily produce them by the aid of the devil, who makes use of them as a means of deceiving souls.

But some one will say: How can there be a compact with the devil, since when I have recourse to these things I do not desire any help from him? Truly you may not exactly ask the devil to help you in such practices, but you do so implicitly and by your acts.

Two people go to take a walk out of town in a certain land. On the way they become thirsty; "Oh," they say, "what a pity we have not something to drink!"

A little further on they see a house with a garland of ivy or a green bush hanging outside the door. "Now," they say, "we are all right; we can get wine here." How do they know that? How can a garland of ivy teach one that wine is to be had in that house? Certainly the garland has not that power of itself; but, since it has been once for all agreed upon that such a thing outside the door is a sign that wine can be had within, I know at once when I see it what it means. It is the same with superstitious practices. The devil made the agreement once for all with those who first began these practices: These things shall reveal my agency and power. Thus, for instance, he arranged: "Whosoever shall say such and such words, or do this or that in certain circumstances, shall be looked upon by me as desiring my help." As soon, therefore, as these words are spoken or those actions performed, the devil comes at once, as if at a given signal. Hence, when I knowingly have recourse to such practices, it is the same as if I said: I know that whoever does this will be helped by the devil; I do it now in order to get help from him, too." It is in *this* that the malice of superstition consists. This is the reason why Satan, who always grudges the

Almighty the honor shown him, and tries to deprive him of it whenever he can, has introduced into the world so many different superstitious customs, and has taken such pains to keep them alive amongst the ignorant. In that way he succeeds in depriving God of the adoration due to him; he gradually lessens men's confidence in God, and leads them on imperceptibly, even by means of hypocritical piety, to commit other sins, to live in the state of sin, and to die impenitent.

In conclusion, let us all profit by the warning that St. Paul addresses to the Galatians regarding vain observations of certain times and days: "But now, after that you have known God, or, rather, are known by God: how turn you again the weak and needy elements, which you desire to serve again. You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest perhaps I have labored in vain for you."

In the same way should each one of you think. God has called me by his admirable light to the one true Church, in which I must place confidence, and adore and love a God of infinite power, goodness, and wisdom. I have been born of Catholic parents: shall I, then, be so superstitious, so foolish, so wicked, as to occupy myself with such nonsensical practices, and make common cause with the devil? No, I protest against it. Far from me be all superstition! I wish to serve God and to adore him alone, not with lies and follies, but in spirit and in truth, that I may one day adore him in that place where faith shall have an end, and I shall see him face to face. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent.

The Superstition of Fortune-telling.

"*What went you out to see? A prophet?*"—Matt. 9 : 9.

The Jews had a great opinion of John the Baptist, for they went out into the desert to see him, to admire his wonderful mode of life, and to hear his preaching. On one occasion the priests and Levites sent messengers to ask him: "Who art thou? Art thou Elias, or perhaps the Messias himself?" Still these men did not know exactly what he was. Christ therefore took occasion to explain to them one day the great sanctity of his precursor, and to show them that it was not without reason that they went out to see such a great man. "What went you out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it was written: Behold, I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." There are still prophets to be found here and there in the world, to whom people have recourse in certain circumstances for help and advice. I will ask these people: "What went you out to see? A prophet?" Yes, but not a holy prophet; a false prophet, who, under the pretence of giving you good advice or helping you in your necessity, devours your souls like a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing, and brings them to hell. It is my purpose to-day to warn you against these false prophets or fortune-tellers. Understand, then:

I. That to have recourse to them, on any occasion whatever for help or advice, is a mortal sin.

II. That the customary excuses for such conduct are all vain and worthless.

I. It is a mortal sin to ask help from the devil; and this is

done by those who have recourse to fortune-tellers or clairvoyants. They go to these people to obtain the cure of certain diseases in man or beast, to recover lost or stolen goods, to secure the return of people who have escaped or lost their way, or to ascertain whether a certain enterprise is likely to succeed or not. They pay them for advice and help, and the man or woman thus consulted is expected to cure the disease, or point out the thief; to say where the lost or stolen money or property is hidden; to compel the person who has escaped to return, or to say whether the undertaking will succeed or not; and all this by means that are in themselves superstitious and utterly inadequate (naturally speaking) to produce the effects required. All who consult such people in any matter whatever, or ask advice from them, are worshippers of the devil, and are guilty of making a contract with him and asking help from him.

But because they thus deal indirectly with the devil they will tell you: "God forbid that I should have anything to do with the devil! I only seek help from wise men on earth, not from the demons in hell; and I nearly always find what I seek!" But what is the difference, when you want a favor, between handing in your petition to the President with your own hands, or getting a member of his Cabinet or one of his friends to hand it in for you? Do you not ask a favor in one way just as in the other? Nay, it is very probable that you are more likely to obtain your request through the friend of the President, than if you made it yourself in person. What difference is there between calling upon the devil yourself for aid, or appealing to his agents and ministers, who are sure to help you only by diabolical means?

Where do the people whom you consult get their knowledge of healing? How do they know the thief who has stolen your money, or the place in which he has hidden it? How can they say whether your undertaking is to turn out a success or not? Have they received private revelations from God, or are they

endowed with a special power of working miracles? Not very likely. It is true God knows all things. He sees afar off as clearly as close at hand; he knows the future as well as the present; but he reserves that knowledge to himself.

God can communicate to creatures a portion of this knowledge; he can reveal to them hidden and future things; he can give them the grace to work miracles, and he really has bestowed this special grace and knowledge on many Saints in the Old and the New Testament. Thus Samuel prophesied to Saul where he should find his father's asses, and gave him certain signs by which he might know that God had chosen him king of Israel. And everything happened to Saul as Samuel had foretold. Naaman, the general of the king of Syria, had recourse to the prophet Eliseus to be cleansed from leprosy. And Eliseus sent a messenger to him, saying: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean." Naaman washed in the Jordan seven times, and his health was restored and he was made clean. But Samuel and Eliseus were holy men: publicly appointed by God as prophets. The people were told to go to them, and were assured that they would learn from them the divine will.

Who has made prophets of fortune-tellers? When has it been revealed, either in the written or unwritten word of God, that he will speak by their mouths, and make known hidden and future things? Can it be proved that they have received from on high the power of working miracles? Where are their signs of extraordinary sanctity to prove that God has selected and appointed them to such an office? At all events, neither the prophets of old nor the Saints of our times ever asked for money for healing the sick by a miracle, or for making known hidden and future things, while the contrary is the case with those false prophets, who take good care that they are well paid for their jugglery. You will get very little advice or help from them unless you pay them for it.

No reasonable person will believe that fortune-tellers get their real or supposed knowledge of hidden and future things from God, or from his inspiration. Therefore it must come from the devil and by his help, in virtue of a compact entered into with him, either orally or in writing. But how can the devil infuse this knowledge into his instruments? How can he foretell the future, since God has reserved that knowledge to himself and to those to whom he reveals it? Neither the Angels nor the devils can by their mere natural powers have any knowledge of future things, or of the secret thoughts of one's mind. Since future events depend either on the free will of God or of man, it is impossible to have any certain knowledge of either. The Angels and the devils may indeed conclude with a certain amount of probability, from a man's inclinations and the circumstances in which he is placed, what will be likely to happen to him, but a certain knowledge of it they cannot have, because the man is free, and can—and very often does—act against his inclinations and in spite of his circumstances. Thus, neither the devil nor an angel can know, without a special revelation, whether I am going into a certain house or company this evening, nor do they know whether I am going to travel to-morrow. The devil can never predict such things with infallible certainty. Hence, when he prophesies any of these things, either immediately or by means of his agents, what he says is mere guesswork. If it turns out true, well and good for him, because it helps him to deceive souls and to seduce them all the easier.

To how many has he not promised a long life who died immediately after? How often has he not foretold immediate death to those who lived to a ripe old age? Galeazo, Duke of Milan, was once told by a fortune-teller that he would die prematurely. "And what," asked the duke, "will be your destiny?" "Oh," said the other, "I will live to be very old." "Aha!" said the duke; "I see that your art has deceived you con-

siderably on this occasion. You must know that I am a better prophet than you; you will die before me, and I will prove to you that what I say is true!" Thereupon he had him strangled.

With regard to lost and stolen things, the thief who took them and the place in which they are hidden, since all these are visible things and the work of his own tools, there is no doubt that the devil knows all about them, and therefore he can easily communicate the knowledge of them to fortune-tellers. Yet even in this he is not always to be trusted, for the father of lies often denounces an innocent person as guilty, either for the purpose of deceiving men, or to cause some greater misfortune. There was once a peasant who wrapped up some money he had just received in a piece of fresh hide, and laid it on a bench outside the door whilst he was engaged in doing some work. As soon as he turned his back a pig came up and swallowed down the hide with the money. The peasant looked everywhere for his money, but could not find it. "Where can it have gone to?" he said. "There was no one near the house; I must and will find out all about it at once!" So saying, he ran off to a certain woman in the village, who had the reputation of knowing more than other people, to ask her what had become of his money. The witch told him that he must wait a little, and not dare to follow her. She then crept into a dark hole, and after some frightful incantations and conjuring, she cried out in a loud voice: "Where is the money that this man has lost?" A terrible voice answered her, saying: "The man's own pig has eaten it. But you must tell him that his wife has taken it, so that there may be strife and disunion in the house!" The witch did as she was directed. But the peasant had seen and heard everything that went on in the dark hole, and when he came home he killed the pig and found the purse in its stomach.

False prophets of this kind are those suspicious characters to whom Christians have recourse for the cure of their diseases,

the recovery of lost property, or the telling of their fortunes. What else is it all but asking the devil for advice and help? And this is done by Christians who have sworn fidelity to Jesus Christ, who worship the one true God, and who have solemnly renounced the devil and all his works in Baptism. And it is done without shame, as if there were no harm in it.

II. They say, to excuse themselves: "What does it matter to me what the fortune-teller or clairvoyant does, or what art he or she makes use of? All I want is to recover my lost property, to get rid of my disease, or to find out something that interests me very much. I protest that I wish to have nothing to do with the devil!"

You may protest what you please a thousand times; it remains true that you have dealings with the devil, for you seek help by means inadequate of themselves to produce the required effect. You seek it by means resulting from diabolical agency, and it is never lawful to have recourse for aid to the arch-enemy of God or to his instruments.

"This is all very fine talk," replies the superstitious sinner, "but it does not prevent these people from helping me. By their means I get back my lost property, or am healed of my maladies."

Of course they help you, but it is through the intervention of the devil. Of course you recover your health, but, alas! at the penalty of eternal death of your soul! Which of these will you choose? Is there not a God in heaven, who can help you just as well, and even better? Is there no saint or friend of God through whose intercession you can recover your lost property or regain your health? Have you not a church in which you can pray to our Lord and his Blessed Mother, beseeching help in your necessities and resignation to the Divine Will in all things? Do you regard the devil as a better helper, physician and benefactor than the God of infinite power, wisdom and

goodness, from whom we have the infallible promise: "Ask and you shall receive"?

"Oh, yes," you return; "I might pray for a long time before being helped so effectually. I have prayed and got others to pray for me; I have had Masses said; but what have I gained thereby? My lost property is not yet recovered; my child is still sick; my son, my husband is still away from me, and I do not know where he is." Well, have patience. I believe that such is really the case with you, but what then? "Well, there is nothing else for me to do but to go to these people, and they will help me for a trifling sum!" Oh, my dear friend, do not say that. If you are a good Christian you must understand that the price you pay for such things is the loss of the grace of God, the destruction of your immortal souls. The chief thing to be considered in our afflictions is the will of God. If our Lord has not heard your prayer, he knows the reason why. He knows that that cure, that restoration of your lost treasure, that knowledge of hidden things, would not be good for your soul. A faithful Christian must believe and trust in the wisdom and goodness of God, as the little child trusts the good father who takes away from him the glittering knife that delights his eye, but threatens his life—the good father who holds him in his tender arms whilst the surgeon performs a painful operation which will give him future health and prolonged days.

Ratify, then, and renew the contract you made with your God in holy Baptism: "I renounce the devil, and all his works and all his pomps." If Satan were to offer you the whole world and all its wealth, as he formerly did to our Saviour, saying: "All these will I give thee if, falling down, thou wilt adore me!" reply to him, as Christ did: "Begone, Satan, for it is written: The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and him only shalt thou serve."

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE LYING TONGUE.

"*He confessed, and did not deny.*"—John 1 : 20.

Of all men, without exception, the Sacred Scripture says: "Every man is a liar" (Ps. 115 : 11); not in the sense that every one must lie, or is accustomed to lie, for all lies under any circumstances are forbidden by God; but the meaning of those words is that all men can lie and knowingly violate the truth. Would to God that lying never went further with us than the bare possibility, and that what the Gospel of to-day says in praise of St. John the Baptist, "He confessed and did not deny," might be said with truth of us all; that the spirit of falsehood had no influence over us! But, alas! what is more common than lies? Most people, in fact, make a habit of it. Yet it is hateful and degrading in the sight of God and man, as I shall show.

I. The habit of lying is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of the world.

II. It is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of God.

I. It is a great honor for a man when people say of him what Jesus said of Nathanael: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John 1 : 47); and when he is looked upon as an honest, upright man, whom one can trust without fear of treachery, and whose word can be relied on. On the other hand, there is nothing more degrading to a man than to have the name of being false, of acting deceitfully, so that one cannot trust him or believe what he says.

1. Now, the habit of lying is almost the only vice which gives a man that bad name. To be caught in a single falsehood is quite enough to give one that bad name, so that he is not believed afterwards, even when he speaks the truth. If a man has lied to me once, I can never trust him again. Even they who have the habit of telling lies, and who seldom speak the truth, cannot bear to be looked on as liars. It is considered a most grievous insult to be accused of an untruth, and people often take satisfaction for it by an appeal to arms, for there is many a one who would rather shed his blood and endanger his life than rest quietly under such an insult. And how ashamed one feels who is convicted of a falsehood! Fathers and mothers, even if you are too indulgent to your children in other things, yet you daily warn them against the vice of lying. Be careful, my child, you say, never tell a lie; woe betide you if I ever catch you telling an untruth; I will punish you most severely, for he who lies will also steal.

2. And this is one of the chief reasons why God has forbidden lying as sinful, so that even a jocose lie is never lawful, under any circumstances; that, namely, the social relations of men with each other may not be disturbed. Now, these relations could not be maintained at all if it were ever lawful to lie, because then no one could trust his neighbor, and every one would always be in dread of deceit and treachery; so that there would be an end of mutual trust and confidence. Hence, if the law of God and the law of nature did not prohibit lying, all spiritual and civil authority would be forced unanimously to prohibit it under severe penalties, for the general welfare. The Emperor Claudius caused the dead body of a certain Pamphilus to be exhumed and to be thrown to the dogs and carrion birds, while all the property he left behind was confiscated, and his wife and children were banished, because it had been reported to the emperor that Pamphilus had been a habitual liar. Artaxerxes, king of Persia, having once convicted one of his sol-

diers of a falsehood, ordered his tongue to be pierced with three nails. The emperor Trajan had deposed the king of Thrace on account of rebellion, and placed the son of the latter on the throne; but because the son once told him a lie, by saying that he was coming home from school, whereas he had been in the garden eating fruit, Trajan, full of anger, took the crown from him again. "You are a liar," he said, "and therefore unworthy to reign; nor is it right that Rome, the mother of truth, should have a lying son."

But, hateful and hated as the name of a liar is, yet that vice is only too common amongst all classes, for, as Jeremias says: "They will not speak the truth, for they have taught their tongue to speak lies" (Jer. 9 : 5). To conceal one's meaning in every possible way; to utter truth as falsehood, and falsehood as truth; to know how to hide one's feelings, and to speak friendly words with a heart full of falsehood and bitterness; to make grand promises which one has not the least intention of fulfilling; to hide by falsehoods the envy, hatred, vindictiveness, usury, and injustice; to seek profit by lying in the public prints, in buying and selling; that, says St. Gregory, is the wisdom and prudence of the cunning world. He who is ignorant of this art, who speaks as he thinks, and acts honestly and uprightly in all things, is laughed at as a simpleton, and as one who knows not the ways of the world.

3. You know what happened to Giezi, the servant of the prophet Eliseus, who tried to enrich himself by a falsehood? Eliseus had refused the rich presents offered him by Naaman, whom he had cured of leprosy, and Naaman was already on the way back to his own country, when the thought occurred to Giezi that his master was over-scrupulous not to take what was offered to him, and that it would not be a bad plan if he were to try to secure something for himself. With this idea he ran after Naaman, who, as soon as he saw him coming, descended from his chariot in token of respect to Eliseus his master,

greeted the servant kindly, and asked him what he wanted. "My master hath sent me to thee," answered Giezi (count all the lies he told; there is one of them, for Eliseus had not given him any such commission), "saying: 'Just now there are come to me, from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the Prophets. (That was the second lie, for there was not a word of truth in all he said.) Give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments!'" (The third lie.) But Naaman was ashamed to give so little. "It is better," said he, "that thou take two talents;" and he forced him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they carried them before him (4 Kings 5 : 22-23). Naaman then continued his journey. Giezi, full of joy at the success of his trickery, returns home; but he little knew what a misfortune was in store for him, nor what a calamity his ill-gotten treasures were to bring upon him. So far he had succeeded; he stored away the silver and the clothes carefully in his house; no one knew anything of his good fortune, and his thoughts were busy about the vineyards he intended to buy, the number of servants he would have, and the choice of food he could enjoy every day. Full of these thoughts, he presents himself before his master, who asks him, gravely: "Whence comest thou, Giezi?" He answered: "Thy servant went nowhither." That was the fourth shameless lie he told. What! said his master, you went nowhere? And who was it that overtook Naaman, and received from him two talents of silver and two changes of garments? And who is it that has concealed those gifts, brought by two servants, so that I might not see them? "Was not my heart present when the man turned back from his chariot to meet thee?" (4 Kings 5 : 25, 26.) Eliseus, who knew the deceit Giezi had been guilty of, said to him: "So now thou hast received garments, thou hast received money to buy olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants." But see

what good it will do you. "The leprosy of Naaman shall also stick to thee, and to thy seed forever; and Giezi went out from him a leper as white as snow" (Ibid. 26 : 27). If God were to punish lying in that way there would be a great number of sick people in the world; but at the same time the number of those who are not afraid to lie would decrease considerably. But even if the Almighty in his merciful goodness deals gently with us in that respect, there are still greater punishments in store for those who wilfully violate the truth. For if the habit of lying gives one a bad name before the world, that is the least of the ill effects that follow from it. What should most of all deter us from this habit is the fact that it makes man hateful to God.

II. Mortal sin alone is able to draw down the divine anger on the sinner. Venial sin, although displeasing the holiness of God, does not deprive the soul of his friendship. A lie is in itself but a venial sin, unless it is foreseen to be the cause of a great injury, or of quarrelling and strife, or of grievous harm to our neighbor's honor, or of sacrilege in the holy Sacrament of Penance; for in any of those cases one may commit a grievous sin by a trivial lie. Yet Holy Scripture condemns wilful falsehoods so strongly, and so much more vehemently than any other venial sin, that we could almost say that every lie is a mortal sin and most hateful in the sight of God. Thus we read: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity; thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps. 5 : 7). And again: "The mouth that belieth killeth the soul" (Wis. 1 : 11). And once more: "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape" (Prov. 19 : 5). What conclusion are we to draw from all this? That every lie is a mortal sin? No; but that lying must be extremely hateful to God.

1. Lying is opposed to truth, consequently to "the God of truth" (Ps. 30 : 6). "I am the truth" (John 14 : 6), says the

Son of God of himself. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth" (John 18 : 37). On the other hand, the Holy Scripture calls the devil "the father of lies;" so that he who is in the habit of lying cannot be of God, but of the devil, because they who love lying are children of the devil.

2. It is never lawful to tell even a jocose lie. It is forbidden, under pain of grievous sin, to take away man's life; yet I may do so in self-defence. But not even to save my life would it be lawful for me to tell a lie. Stealing is forbidden under pain of grievous sin; yet under certain circumstances I may, without sin, take what belongs to another, namely, if I am in extreme necessity and have no other means of preserving my life. But it never would be lawful for me to procure necessary sustenance by telling a lie. But, you will ask, is lying, then, worse than murder and theft, since the latter are sometimes lawful, but the former never? No; by murder we mean taking away a man's life unjustly, an act that is always sinful in itself, and can never become lawful. Theft means taking away another's property unjustly, which is always sinful, and can never become lawful. Therefore, to take away a man's life or his property unjustly is certainly a greater sin than to tell a simple lie. The idea I wish to convey to you is this: Under certain circumstances God can give me the right over the life or property of another, so that if I kill a man I shall not be guilty of murder, or if I take away my neighbor's property I shall not be guilty of theft. On the other hand, God can never give us a right to tell a lie, nor can he counsel, much less command or approve of lying. As God can never under any circumstances make blasphemy or idolatry lawful, so he can never make even the smallest and most advantageous lie lawful.

3. It is foolish, then, to say that by concealing the truth by a trivial lie one can often do a great deal of good or avert a great misfortune, or prevent himself or others from being put to pub-

lic shame; and that under such circumstances lying is lawful, especially when it does no wrong or harm to others. Again, there are some who maintain that they must often tell a lie in their families for the sake of preserving peace; for if they told the truth they would give rise to quarrelling, dissension, and hatred, which might be the occasion of many grievous sins. If you, by telling a trivial lie, could put an end to all the wars that devastate so many countries, and are the cause of so many fearful sins, and if you could thereby restore peace to the whole world, it would not be lawful for you to tell a lie; much less for the sake of keeping peace in a household. And if you could save your own life, or that of another, by telling a lie, you must rather sacrifice your life, or that of your neighbor, than be guilty of the lie; much less, then, is lying lawful merely for the sake of some temporal profit.

4. What a divine work it is to gain a soul! If it were necessary thereto that all men should sacrifice their worldly goods, their honor, their comfort, their lives even, they should all joyfully make that sacrifice for the sake of gaining one soul for God and for heaven. And yet, if you could gain all souls by one small lie, it would not be lawful for you to tell that lie; no, that lie would be a sin. The reason of it is clearly laid down by St. Paul: "Let us not do evil that there may come good" (Rom. 3 : 8). Let those who imagine that lying is sometimes necessary make a note of that. I have told lies, they say, but I could not help it. It was for the sake of preventing quarrels at home, or to keep my husband from drinking too much. No; it is never necessary to commit sin, and therefore it is never necessary to tell a lie. From this it is evident that there is no excuse for those who order their children or domestics to lie for some trivial reason, telling them to say, for instance, that their masters or parents are not at home; or who lie by way of a joke, or for the sake of amusement.

5. But, some will say, am I, then, always bound to declare

the truth to every one who asks me? By no means; that is not at all necessary, nor would it be always advisable. For there are circumstances in which I might commit a grievous sin by making known the truth; for instance, if I reveal an important secret, or disclose anything injurious to my neighbor's good name, or to the charity I owe him, even if I am asked to make the disclosure. It is one thing not to disclose the truth, and another to speak contrary to the truth or to lie; the former I may be often bound to do, the latter can never be lawful. Therefore, when such indiscreet questions are asked, or when by concealing the truth I can prevent sin or hinder people from quarrelling, I must either hold my tongue and refuse to answer, or I must go away or otherwise show that I do not wish to answer, or I must give an evasive reply, or answer in such a way as to leave the other in doubt as to whether I mean yes, or no. Once for all, to speak deliberately against one's knowledge is a lie, and that is never lawful, no matter what advantage may be derived from it.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak ye the truth, every man with his neighbor; for we are members one of another" (Ephes. 4 : 25), and we must deal uprightly with each other. "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no" (Matt. 5 : 37), as our Saviour tells us, and speak candidly, without deceit; and you will have God as your friend, and men, too, will be your friends when they know that you are truthful. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

SUPERSTITION IN SACRED THINGS.

"A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight his paths."—Luke 3 : 4.

Who is it that was crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the paths of the Lord"? St. John Baptist, who was a prophet; not one of those false prophets, ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing, who, by their diabolical advice and help, bring souls to destruction, but a true prophet called to office by God, to instruct the people. What did he teach? "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight his paths." The path of the Lord must not be crooked, or uneven; you must keep the commandments of God, and adore Him in spirit and in truth. Hence, the Gospel excludes all superstition, which pepares the way for the devil, and not for God. Prayer, divine service, and other manifestly good works are all holy things, that should serve to prepare the way of the Lord, yet even these are often used superstitiously by the pious through ignorance, by the wicked through malice. Hence I will explain to you, to-day.

I. How superstition may be committed through prayers, devotions and holy things; and

II. How to discern when a devotion is superstitious.

It is an old saying that where God has a church, the devil builds a chapel. He leaves no stone unturned in his efforts to preserve amongst Christians, and to spread throughout the world, some relics of ancient idolatry. But he is not always

successful with pious and fairly-instructed Christians, who put no faith in vain observations and superstitious practices. He therefore hides his wickedness under a very specious cloak; that is, he tries to deceive the faithful by an appearance of holiness, to lead them on to the vice of superstition by certain devotions and holy things—nay, even by the very sign of the cross, which is so often used to put him to flight. Since he cannot prevent the true God from being adored, he endeavors at least to prevent men from honoring and adoring as he wishes.

It is well for Christians to know that there exists what is called superfluous worship, a false devotion, which is not ordained by God nor approved of by the Church, nor in accordance with her general customs. One of the chief features of this delusion is the attributing to certain prayers and works of piety a power and efficacy which they have not in themselves, and have not received from God or from his Church. Let me give you an example of this: A certain noble lady, whose only and dearly loved little son was sick, came to a priest for consolation and advice in her affliction. "Father," she said, "a certain pious person, who has received special lights from God, has told me of a very efficacious form of devotion, by which I shall certainly be able to secure the recovery of my child; but, influenced probably by humility and a desire of concealing the divine favors, the person charged me strictly not to say a word of this to any one." "What is the devotion?" asked the priest. "I must have a Mass said," answered the lady, "in honor of the Blessed Trinity." "Very good, indeed," rejoined the priest; "the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is of infinite value, and devotion to the Blessed Trinity is infinitely good and powerful. It would be a very good thing to have the Mass said. But why make such a secret of it?" "Oh," returned the lady, "because this Mass is to be said under very special circumstances and conditions. In the Blessed Trinity we adore one God in three distinct Persons; now, three and one written in succession make

thirty-one; therefore the priest that says the Mass must be exactly thirty-one years old. Again, one and three written in succession make thirteen, therefore the Mass-server must be exactly thirteen years old." "Very good; is that all?" "No," she continued; "there must be three candles on the altar, and the Mass must begin exactly at nine o'clock, because three times three are nine. Thus, the priest, the Mass-server, the hour and the candles all clearly signify the mystery of the Blessed Trinity." "This is all nonsense, and worse than nonsense," said the priest; "it is nothing but superstition. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has the same power and efficacy, whether it is said at seven or at nine o'clock, whether the priest is forty or thirty-one years old, or whether there are three, four, or two candles on the altar. Away with such devotions! If you want to offend God, my friend, by a grievous mortal sin, and to cure your child by the help of the devil, then you can do as you please." Thus he dismissed the simple-minded lady.

II. Let me now give you a general rule, by which you can determine whether there is anything that savors of superstition in even the holiest practices of devotion. Whenever there is an obligation to observe a certain time or hour, a certain number or a certain posture. For instance, a certain prayer or devotion, not matter how holy it is, must be said or performed on a certain day at sunrise, at a certain altar, in a certain church, kneeling on a stone; the sign of the cross has to be made so many times, and so many *Our Fathers* have to be said. Furthermore, if this designated place, time, number, or method be not strictly observed, you are told that the prayer or devotion in question will lose all its efficacy. Now this, my friends, gives manifest proof of a shameful superstition. It is far different with the public devotions approved of by the Church—for instance, the devotion of the nine Tuesdays in honor of St. Anthony of Padua, or that of the ten Fridays in honor of St. Fran-

cis Xavier, the apostle of India, on which days it is the custom to confess and communicate, in order to receive the grace of God through the intercession and merits of those great Saints. Still, if even in this case one were to put his faith in a certain number or a certain day, that if he missed confession or Communion on one of the nine or ten days, or if he did not confess on the Tuesday or Friday, he would think that his devotions were of no good, then he would be guilty of superstition. The fixed number of Tuesdays and Fridays has nothing to do with it. Confession and Communion on a Sunday in honor of a saint is just as meritorious as on a Tuesday or a Friday.

Another general rule for detecting superstition in prayers and holy things is when an infallible power or efficacy for eternal salvation is attributed to them. For example, if some one declares that he who says the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* seven times, and continues to say them until they have reached the number of drops of blood that our Lord shed during his scourging, will certainly go to heaven, he tells a barefaced lie and gives utterance to a deceit of the devil. It is not enough for the fisherman merely to cast his hook and line into the water; if he does not attach the proper bait to his hook, and cast it where the fish are known to abound, he will be a long time without getting a bite. Again, to kill flies in a room you must disguise the taste of the poison by sugar, or honey, or sweet milk. It is in this way that the wily fiend acts. If he were to propose to pious people superstitious practices, which have clearly no power in themselves to produce the desired effect, he would not succeed in catching one of them, nor in making one believe in him, and so he prepares a more agreeable bait for them. In order to induce them to take the poison, he mixes honey with it. He brings in the name of Christ, and deludes them largely with a semblance of holy ceremonies, and he not only promises temporal prosperity to those who use these false devotions, irrespective of their way of life, but also a happy

death and the eternal salvation of their souls. In this evil snare he catches numberless Christians.

There are certain prayers that are good enough in themselves, but to the recitation of which are attached infallible promises of all kinds. For instance, he who recites such a prayer daily may expect on his deathbed to see the Mother of God, according to her promise. Another guarantees that he shall not die without the last Sacraments, or that Christ will be merciful to him in his last moments. Another, that the reciter thereof will soon be freed from purgatory—and so on, strongly reminding one of the advertisements of a quack medicine which claims to be a panacea for all human ills. What are we to think of these prayers? As far as I am concerned, they may be good enough in themselves, and I would not forbid any one to say them; but as to the promises connected with them, I would not give a straw for them. They are mere clap-traps, invented by the devil to deceive the inexperienced, and to give them a foolish confidence of salvation, on the strength of which they often lead an impious life, thinking that they cannot be lost as long as they say these prayers daily. That is not the way to go to heaven in true and simple faith. To place one's trust in such things, and to risk one's eternal salvation by their use, is to sin by gross superstition.

But you will say: Does not God tell us all to pray, and has not St. James told us to "ask in faith, nothing wavering"? You cannot deny that two of the most excellent qualities of fervent prayer are faith and confidence; may not—nay, *must* not—one put his faith and trust in prayer, without being guilty of superstition? Certainly. But on what, pray tell me, does our faith and confidence in prayer repose? Not on certain words that can be altered or omitted at will, but on the infallible promises and faithfulness of God, who has promised to give me everything that is necessary for my soul, not (I repeat) on account of certain words, but on account of the fervor, humility, and perse-

verance of my prayer. Pray, then, and pray humbly and fervently, and God will grant you a happy death. Believe also, and have a firm confidence that God will give you the grace of final perseverance, provided you strive for it during life, for that is the condition on which it is granted. Pray, and pray fervently, for the grace to live well, and to be faithful to the end in the love and service of God and his Blessed Mother. Believe, and have a firm confidence that God will give, and our Lady obtain for you grace enough to remain constant, provided you co-operate with your present graces. This is another condition that must be fulfilled. And all this you will get from God whether you use this form of words or that. Therefore, a certain form of words has nothing at all to do with the efficacy of prayer, much less can it make one sure of salvation.

Therefore, they believe and hope in vain who expect to find salvation by such means. They are mad, indeed, who deceive themselves by superstitious practices of any kind! For from whom do they expect help? From the devil, and from no one else. But the devil can do nothing but what God permits him to do. He cannot exceed by a hair's breadth the divine permission as to circumstances of time, place, and manner. You will read in the Holy Scriptures of this evil spirit speaking by the mouths of four hundred false prophets, in order to deceive king Achab, but he had first to ask and receive permission from God to that effect. You will find that he is a cruel spirit who excited all the elements against the pious Job; but not before he had permission from God to torment that wonderful man; nor dared he advance a single step until the divine permission was granted him. First of all, he got leave to attack Job in his worldly goods, but on the express condition that he should not hurt his body: "All that he hath is in thy hand," said the Lord to Satan; "only, put not forth thy hand upon the person." After that God gave him permission to torment Job's body also, but on condition that he would do nothing to his soul. And

the Lord said to Satan: "Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life." You will find this arch-enemy of God and man an unclean spirit, who wishes to enter into a herd of swine, but not even that could he do until Christ gave him leave. See how little power the devil has—he cannot hurt even swine unless our Lord allows him to do so. How much less, then, can he hurt or help man, who is made to the image of God?

Therefore, I say to you with David: "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land, and thou shalt be fed with its riches. Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart." Away with everything—prayers, devotions and holy things which savor of superstition! Let us put our hope in God, in his infinite goodness and mercy, and in the intercession of Mary and of the Angels and Saints. But we must not be content with that alone: Trust in God, and do good; not only that which is good in itself, but that which will make you good. To hear Mass, and to say the Rosary, and to give alms, are good works; but if you do them in the state of mortal sin they will not make you good, nor will they help you much to salvation. With a good prayer on our lips, and confidence in our hearts, and good works in our hands, we shall find out the truth of the words: "How good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart," to those who serve him constantly with faithful hearts. We shall find that he who trusts in the Lord and serves him, and loves him with all his heart, will not be confounded forever. Amen.

Sunday After Christmas.

The Evil Effects of Scandal.

"*Behold, this child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.*"—Luke 2 : 34.

How many Christians are there for whose ruin Jesus is set, because, although they acknowledge him to be the true God, they do not honor him as such, and are ashamed to follow his example, so that the life of Christ is to them only an occasion of a deeper damnation! But this is all contrary to the intention of our Saviour, who came down from heaven and suffered death that all men might be saved; and therefore it was solely through their own malice that the Son of God was a stumbling block to the Jews and Gentiles; and it is still owing solely to the wickedness of Christians that many of them turn away from Christ, and are lost forever. But how many Christians there are nowadays of whom one might say with truth: Behold this man is placed, not for the resurrection, but for the ruin of many souls! They are those who deliberately go in opposition to our Lord, and dig a pit for the souls of others by giving them scandal and leading them into sin.

I. For they who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opponents of Christ.

II. Therefore, "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!"

To give scandal and to be scandalized are two different things, one of which can be without the other. For instance,

there are three of you together; one begins an impure conversation, and thus gives scandal to the other two; the second laughs at it, and consents to a bad thought; he is scandalized; the third is angry with both of them, and leaves their company; he commits no sin, but rather practises a work of virtue. Being scandalized, then, means to offend God on account of some action or omission on the part of others; while to give scandal means to do or omit something which gives or may give occasion of sin to another. To give scandal is the vice that Christ warns us against in the Gospel—a vice that, grievous as it is, is unfortunately only too common in the world nowadays amongst people of all classes; so that one might almost say with truth that one-half of the world gives scandal, and the other half suffers from it, and thus, on account of the scandal, the whole world is in a state of sin. Scandal may be given by saying, doing, or omitting anything which, of its own nature or by force of circumstances, is capable of leading others into any kind of sin, although there be no intention of leading them astray, although no sin actually follows. The scandal-givers are the partisans of the devil. Their object is to teach wickedness to innocent souls, and to lead them astray.

Take a child ten or twelve years old; I ask you, if that child never heard an impure conversation, would it know how to talk impurely? If it never heard cursing or swearing, would it know how to use impious language? If it never was tempted to impurity by others, and knew not how sins of that kind are committed, would it be guilty of them? And if young people are dissolute in their morals, they have learned to be so from others; children learn it from grown-up people, and these latter from their seniors. See what a plague is spread in a community by those agents of the devil who give scandal!

But why do I call them agents of the devil? The name is far too good for them; they do more to lead souls astray than the devil himself. One of them gains more for hell, and destroys

more souls, than a hundred demons could, with all their temptations and snares. Which of you can say that an evil spirit has given him a bad example, and thereby led him into sin? Who can say the devil has taught me this or that vice? You have never seen one of those fallen spirits, and if one were to appear to you, you would run away through fear and terror of him. But are there not many who must acknowledge that they have been led to offend God by the treachery of their fellowmen? Thus, what the devil cannot do by himself to destroy souls, he effects by the help of scandal-givers. What caused the fall of our forefather Adam? The hellish serpent did not dare to tempt him, knowing well that he was too wise to yield to temptation, but when Eve came up to him with her flatteries and caresses, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, his ruin and that of us all was at once effected. In the History of the Church we read of holy men, such as Macarius, James, John, and others, who, after having spent long years in the desert and in the mountain caves, practising the greatest austerities, fell into the most shameful crimes. Who caused their fall? The devil cannot boast of having done it; he had made repeated attacks on them, but he could not gain a single victory over them; an abandoned woman was able to do more than all the demons in hell, to make those men offend God and fall into the most grievous sins. So powerful is scandal to destroy souls; and the devil, with all his rage against souls and all his craft in tempting them, would often fail to succeed were it not that he calls in scandal-givers to help him.

Naturally man is inclined to do what he, without being astonished thereby, hears of and sees others doing. A stranger on a journey comes to a river that he has to cross; he cannot find a bridge, nor does he know whether the river is deep or not, so that he is afraid to ford it. He walks along the bank for a time, and at length notices the traces of footsteps leading down to the water; he is overjoyed at this, and at once ventures in.

Foolish man! wait: how do you know that you will be able to get across? Oh, I see that others have been here before me, and where they crossed, I can cross, too. But are you sure that they reached the opposite bank alive, and were not carried down by the stream? He does not stop to consider that; he rushes in, gets into a deep place, and is drowned. The footsteps led him astray. You who give scandal, into what a raging, hellish sea you plunge whenever you commit mortal sin! You dishonor your God, you kill your precious souls, you ruin yourselves completely! But that is not all; you leave behind treacherous footsteps to mislead those who follow, and thus you involve many souls in the same destruction with yourselves. How many would never have entered on the way of sin if they had not been led astray by the footsteps of others! At first a pious soul is horrified at the very name of this or that vice. Shall I do that? she asks herself. If you do, says her conscience, you will be ruined. But meanwhile she notices the footsteps of others, their examples, and the customs they conform to, and her horror is gone at once! Where they have gone, she thinks, surely I may go. A well-reared child is horrified at the first oath or curse it hears; but if it grows accustomed to such language from its father at home, or from other children in the street, it will begin to curse and swear, too; if my parents or others curse, it thinks, why should not I? A modest, innocent young girl is disgusted at anything approaching impurity; but if she hears unchaste conversation, attends promiscuous gatherings, in which the laws of purity are certainly not too strictly observed, or sees others behaving improperly, and if she hears and sees such things frequently, she will think that, since so many do those things, there cannot be much harm in them, and there will soon be an end to her former modesty and reserve. An innocent young man avoids dangerous company and suspicious houses; he is invited to such places by others, laughed at as wishing to appear a saint if he refuses to go, and at last he

accepts the invitation. A business man, whose tender conscience at first makes him uneasy lest he might now and then be guilty of an injustice, notices the footsteps of others and sees how they are accustomed to act under certain circumstances; oh, he thinks, they have a conscience, too; why should it not be lawful for me to do as they do? there is no other way of getting through the world nowadays. And so he acts as he sees others acting.

"Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!" Woe to him from God, from the souls he has betrayed, from the demons; but also woe to him from the holy Angels! How can they wish to guard him if he acts as their enemy? "Behold," says God, "I will send an angel, who shall go before thee and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared" (Exod. 33 : 20); but, "take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned" (Exod. 33 : 20). Why? "For he will not forgive when thou hast sinned" (Exod. 33 : 22). And what revenge will he take when, besides sinning yourself, you lead into sin the soul entrusted to his care? In truth, if, as Christ says, the conversion of one soul causes the Angels such joy—"I say to you, there shall be joy before the Angels of God upon one sinner doing penance" (Luke 15 : 10)—how great must be their sorrow when a soul is lost eternally? Imagine the anger of a mother with the servant who through mere wantonness allows her little son to fall out of her arms on the ground, so that he hurts himself and is lamed. How, then, must an angel look on him who ruins eternally the beloved soul entrusted to his care? "See," says our Lord, speaking against scandal, "that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18 : 10); that is, be on your guard, for the Angels before the throne of God will cry out for vengeance against you if you scandalize or injure a single soul.

Woe to you on your deathbed, when you are most in need of the help of the holy Angels! Even the holiest men look on that anxious hour as a terrible and dangerous one; what must it then be for you, who have so often troubled the Angels, and turned them against you? How will it be with you when you are on the threshold of eternity, and the prayer for your departing soul is being said: "May the holy Angels of God meet him and lead him into the heavenly city"? What answer will you make when one of them asks you what has become of the soul you have betrayed, when he will require that soul at your hands? Will you answer him like Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is what the children of the world say. What are others to me? they ask; I sin on my own account; I have no desire to lead others astray. Certainly, the Judge will answer, you are to blame for the ruin of that soul; your wicked talk, your flattery, your bad example has destroyed that soul, and many others, too; I now require all these souls at your hands. What answer will you make? Woe to you, finally, in the General Judgment, when the Son of God himself will come: "The Son of man shall send his Angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all scandals" (Matt. 13 : 41). If these Angels do not find amongst the elect the souls entrusted to their care, because through you those souls are lost, where will you fly from their anger? How will you be able to account for the number of sins that have been committed through the scandal given by you? Hear what will happen to you: "You shall be cast into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," in that eternal fire, which "is prepared for the devil and his angels."

What resource is there left for those who give scandal? None but this: you must give back the souls that you have filched away from Christ and his Angels; and, first of all, you must give back your own soul to God by a true repentance for your sins, and then you must endeavor to encourage others to

virtue by edifying conversation, a pious life and good example, so that you may make some atonement for the loss you have caused by leading souls astray. Cannot the desire of your own salvation move you to this? Are you still resolved to offend your God? Have you renounced all hopes of heaven? Does not the thought of an eternal hell inspire you with fear? Or have you made up your mind to be lost forever? If so, then have your own way; go on to your eternal destruction. But one thing I ask of you with God himself: "Let all your wicked doings suffice you" (Ezech. 44 : 6); sin yourselves, but do not prevent others from doing good; let them save their souls, and do not keep them out of heaven, nor drag them down to hell with yourselves. Amen.

First Sunday After Epiphany.

The Dangerous State of Those Who Seldom Hear the Word of God.

"*After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.*"—Luke 2 : 46.

What a beautiful lesson does not our Lord give to us all. Do you imitate his example? Do you hear and obey those who are placed over and who have one day to give an account of you? Do you keep the laws of Mother Church? What of hearing Mass on Sundays and holydays? Do you hear the Word of God in sermons? What wonderful power the Word of God has over the human heart! How much good would it not produce among you if you were all eager and ready to listen to it! You have plenty of opportunities of doing so every Sun-

day and holyday, but, alas! for the deplorable carelessness of so many Christians, who seldom or never make use of those opportunities. What shall I think or say of them? The least I can say is this: To hear the Word of God in sermons but rarely is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. It is a bad sign for a Christian, especially for one who has all sorts of worldly business and anxieties to distract him, and who neither reads nor hears anything of spiritual things during the week, to neglect, as a general rule, the frequent opportunities he has of hearing the Word of God in sermons on Sundays and holydays; I look upon it as a bad sign, on account of what Jesus Christ has said: "Every one that doth evil hateth the light" (John 3 : 20); and I maintain that they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state have no love for the Word of God; and there are four classes of Christians who, as a general rule, neglect to hear the Word of God in sermons, and they are:

I. Those who will not give up the habit of sin;

II. Those who lead an idle, worldly life;

III. Those who are in ignorance through mistaken piety; and

IV. Those who are too busy with temporal affairs.

I. Those who will not give up the habit of sin hear the Word of God but seldom, because, having been accustomed to indulge in certain vices for a long time past, they do not yet think of being converted and of amending their lives. Such are, for instance, those who knowingly possess ill-gotten goods, which they do not intend to restore to the lawful owner; those who, being enmeshed in the toils of an unchaste passion, do not give up nor avoid the proximate occasion of sin, or who allow a secret mortal sin to remain on their consciences for many years, because they are ashamed to declare it candidly in confession. All these people will not go to sermons, or, at all events, they will not be eager to hear them, but will do all they can to avoid

them, because they cannot bear the bitter reproaches of their own consciences, which are touched and disquieted by the explanation of the Gospel truths, and because they fear losing the false peace they have hitherto enjoyed in the midst of their sins.

A monkey cannot bear a looking-glass, nor a camel clear water, because they see their ugly figures reflected therein; therefore, the one will break the looking-glass or throw it away in anger, and the other will trample about in the water until it becomes muddy and is no longer transparent. The Word of God is a looking-glass which places clearly before the eyes of sinners the fearful state of their consciences, the filth and deformity of their sins and vices; they hate this looking-glass, because they cannot look at their own vileness without shame and fear. "The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light" (John 3 : 19). And he gives the reason of that: "For their works were evil: For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved" (John 3 : 19, 20). You cannot cause greater annoyance to a man who is lying in a deep sleep and wants to rest than to shake and pull him about, and hold a lighted candle before his eyes. Oh, he will cry out, turning away his face; go away with that light, and let me alone! It would not be half so bad if you were merely to talk, laugh, or make a noise in the room in which he is sleeping. Why so? Because the light shining in the eyes is the surest to interrupt the sleep that he is so anxious to continue. That is the reason why the habitual sinner has such a hatred of sermons; he is buried in the deep sleep of his sins; he finds a false peace and pleasure in sensuality; he does not wish to be disturbed or awakened; the light of truth, the Word of God in sermons, is likely to disturb this sleep most effectually; it shines in his eyes; it cries out: "Rise, thou that sleepest;" and therefore he cannot bear it; away, he says in thought, away with the light—away with sermons! I will have nothing to do with them.

But that is the very reason why you should be all the more diligent in coming to sermons, and all the more eager and attentive to hear them; that the light may arouse you out of the sleep of sin, which otherwise will certainly be followed by the sleep of eternal death. Come, he says, listen to me! I will make you uneasy, but with an uneasiness that will gain eternal repose for you. But most people do not want to be converted from their evil ways; the unjust wolf, greedy of gold, wishes to remain a wolf; the unchaste swine wishes still to wallow in the filth of his passions; the raven, blackened by sin, wishes still to remain a raven, and to put off repentance to some future time; and therefore they will have nothing to do with sermons or the Word of God. But woe to those who, through fear of being changed and converted, fly the light of truth! God has already pronounced sentence on them in these words: "And this is the judgment; because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light" (John 3 : 19). That is, since they avoid the light of truth, they need not be judged any further; for they are already judged, and the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against them.

II. The second class of men who seldom hear the Word of God are those who lead lives that are apparently not very bad or vicious, but neither are they good or pious. They are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm and tepid; they are quite satisfied if they do nothing that is in their opinion evidently a grievous sin against the commandments of God and of the Church. Otherwise they hardly trouble themselves as to how they fulfil many obligations of their state that bind under pain of sin. They would be very glad to go to heaven, but at the same time their hearts cling to earth and earthly things; they remain away from sermons, either through fear of becoming scrupulous and anxious, and thus being induced to change their mode of life; or else through carelessness or negligence, inas-

much as the thought of going to hear a sermon never occurs to them, and they imagine that they are not in want of the Word of God, and are under no obligation to hear it; or else they are so sensual and unmortified that they will not put themselves to the slight trouble that is necessary to hear the Word of God. In the winter they cannot bear the cold and the harsh wind; in summer the heat oppresses them, or they are afraid of draughts, or of rain.

What a lamentable mistake! They live in great uncertainty and carelessness of their eternal salvation, and yet they imagine they are on the straight road to heaven. If these men and such as these are not in a bad state, there is no doubt that they are in a very dangerous state, and, I might add, in a more dangerous state than those who are openly addicted to gross vices, but who know the unhappy condition in which they are, and may yet be touched by divine grace and repent sincerely and amend their lives. But since they neglect to hear the Word of God they continue in what they imagine to be light, but which is in reality darkness: "they walk in darkness as if it were in light." What a light and knowledge will break upon them, but too late, when the eyes of the body shall be closed in death, and the eyes of the soul shall be opened in the house of their eternity! "Therefore," they will say with the fools in the Book of Wisdom, "we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us" (Wisd. 5 : 6). Because through laziness and sloth we refused to see, and to receive that light, that shining sun, "We have walked through hard ways, but the ways of the Lord we have not known" (Wisd. 5 : 7). Now we acknowledge that we have missed the right road to heaven. What fools that we have been! What an irreparable mistake we have made!

III. The third class consists of those who flatter themselves,

and persuade others, too, as far as their outward actions are concerned, that they are devout and pious, while in reality they are in utter ignorance of many things that are useful and necessary to their eternal salvation, and they are addicted to many serious faults and imperfections. These people seldom hear the Word of God, or, at least, they do not hear it regularly; not because they hate and avoid it, but because they have not taste or desire for it. They think they can employ their time better in some other way for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls. The whole substance of their piety consists in certain special devotions to churches, meditations, vocal prayers, hearing several Masses one after another, making their usual confessions and Communions; the whole day is occupied with these and similar devotions, and each devotion has its own particular hour fixed for it; there must be no interruption, change, shortening, and, least of all, omission in the list of devotions; if anything occurs to be done during the day, no matter what it is, it is put aside if it interferes with them.

Such people are pious only in appearance and in their own imagination, for if we consider their conduct while they are in church at their devotions, and compare it with the way in which they behave at home, or during the performance of the duties of their state, which the law of God obliges them to fulfil under pain of sin, what a striking contrast we should find! During their prayers and meditations they are like Angels in modesty and humility; they shed tears of sweet consolation when they read in their prayer-books about the love of God; a thousand times they offer to God, with their lips, their bodies and souls, and all they have, and they profess to belong entirely to God and to be ready to accept from him crosses and trials, sickness or health, life or death. That is the kind of piety that suits their taste; that is what makes them look on themselves as really devout; and it is a piety and devotion that they have no chance of finding by hearing sermons. But how do they act sometimes,

when they have finished their devotions and get to the end of their pious affections, and go home to do the will of God, not by empty words and with the lips only, but in deed and work? Oh, that is quite a different matter!. It does not belong to their usual devotions, and so, if they are commanded to do anything that does not exactly chime in with their own ideas, they are full of murmurs, complaints, and opposition; they do only what pleases themselves, and what best suits their own convenience. If a person whom they dislike ventures to say a word to displease them, they show just as much proficiency in abusing and reviling that person as they did when in church repeating their prayers. If some trifling thing annoys them—if, so to speak, a cross of straw is laid on their shoulders—there is no more talk of offering themselves altogether to God, to be disposed of according to his will. In a word, all their piety and devotion is on their lips, and in their outward demeanor. And yet they are so obstinate, or, to speak more truly, so infatuated and superstitious in observing the devotional practices they have prescribed for themselves, that they would look on any one who tries to detach them from those devotions as an enemy of God's honor, and their salvation; while if they are obliged to interrupt their usual practices on account of some unforeseen occurrence, they are full of scruples and uneasiness during the whole day, as if they were guilty of some grievous sin; although they make light of neglecting the duties of their state.

IV. The fourth and last class consists of those who are overwhelmed with worldly cares and business, so that they have no time or leisure to hear the Word of God in sermons. For these I have very few words, or, rather, nothing but a sigh of profound pity. Pitiable indeed is your state, oh, unfortunate people! You bury yourselves, of your own accord, so deeply in temporal things that you have no time to devote to the consideration of eternity! you undertake so many different kinds of

business, that you must neglect the all-important business of your souls! Tell me, why are you on this earth? To know God, to love him, to keep his commandments, to do his holy will in all things, and to save your immortal souls; this is the one necessary business, to which all other things must be directed. You send your children twice a day to school to learn to read and write, and fence and dance, and sew and spin; but you are so involved in worldly cares, and so careless and negligent about your precious souls, that you cannot spare half an hour in the week to acquire the knowledge necessary for your eternal salvation. What shall I say of those who hardly once in a month—nay, hardly once or twice in a whole year—hear a sermon? I must say, in the words of our Lord, what does it profit a man to gain by his energy and industry the whole world and all its riches and treasures, if his soul suffer loss thereby? (Matt. 16 : 26.)

Christians, think of this, and let those of you who seldom come to sermons see for yourselves whether you have not grave reason to fear that you may belong to one of those four classes of people whose souls are in a bad state, or, at all events, in a very dangerous state. No matter who you are, it still remains true that to go to sermons rarely, when one has an opportunity of going frequently, is a very bad sign for a Christian. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God," says Christ; "therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God" (John 8 : 47). What a terrible conclusion that is to draw! Yet it must be true, for Christ himself says it.

But what is the use of speaking to those who are absent, and who therefore cannot hear what I say? The whole fruit of this sermon is for you who form my regular audience. Continue to refresh your souls and encourage yourselves in the divine service by constantly hearing the Word of God. Constantly, I say, for to come once to a sermon and stop away two or three times after that is not the sign of a man who is really anxious

to save his soul, and who hungers for its spiritual food. The loss of one sermon may entail an eternal loss, for an opportunity of doing good once lost never comes back again, even if the same sermon were repeated. Still it is not certain that God, who, by his grace, is the Author of all the good that is done by sermons, and who gives to each individual the special grace he has prepared for him, it is not certain that God will offer that grace again. "The Spirit breatheth where he will" (John 3 : 8). Cardinal Newman, being asked the question whether, if he had stayed in the Anglican church till now (July 3, 1871), he should have joined the Catholic Church at all, at any time now or hereafter, said: "I think that most probably I should not; but, observe, for this reason—because God gives grace, and if it is not accepted he withdraws his grace; and, since from his mercy and from no merits of mine, he then offered me the grace of conversion, if I had not acted upon it, it was to be expected that I should be left a worthless stump, to cumber the ground, and to remain where I was till I died" (Letter of Card. Newman, July 3, 1871). Therefore, you must take the light whenever you can. "He that is of God, heareth the Word of God;" let that be verified in us all; we are of God, and therefore we have derived fruit enough for to-day, and we can rejoice and say: "This day is salvation come to this house"—that is, to our souls. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITHOUT FRUIT.

"*Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye.*"—John 2 : 5.

Certainly a salutary and holy exhortation, and one worthy to fall from the lips of the Most Blessed Virgin, who was specially enlightened by God, and whose will was never different from the will of God. "Whatsoever he shall say to ye, do ye;" if you are attentive to every word and sign of my Son, you cannot go wrong. Let us all take this exhortation to ourselves, just as if we heard from the lips of Mary, our dearest Mother, every time we hear a sermon, "whatsoever he shall say to ye, do ye;" be attentive to all that God is about to say to your hearts, so as to live in accordance with it. Oh, if that were always done, what great profit would accrue to souls! But, unfortunately, how many Christians there are who despise the Word of God, and seldom go to sermons! Now I go on to speak of those who constantly hear sermons, amongst whom also there are many who profit as little by what they hear as if they never came to a sermon at all. How so?

Many hear the Word of God in sermons, but without fruit or profit; because the seed falls by the wayside.

There are three causes which prevent the seed that falls by the wayside from bearing fruit.

1. The first is, because the wayside is an open public place, where the seed can easily be blown away by the wind;

2. The second, because the seed, not being covered with earth, cannot take root;

3. The third, because it is liable to be trodden under foot by the passers-by, or to be eaten by the birds.

In like manner the devil has three ways of taking the Word of God out of the hearts of those who hear it, so that it brings no fruit or profit to the soul.

I. Some, as if they were like a public way that is open on all sides, he prevents from understanding the word of God; and these are the idle.

II. Others he prevents from attending to the roots, that is, to the principal truth that is explained; and these are the curious.

III. With others again he causes the truths they have heard and understood to be trampled on and devoured; and these are the tepid and lukewarm.

With all these people the efforts of the devil are to "take the Word out of their hearts, lest, believing, they should be saved" (Luke 8 : 12).

I. The first consists of those who hear the sermon with distracted minds—that is, those idle people who come to church to hear a sermon, not through a supernatural motive to learn something good and to be aroused to do good, but simply to pass away the time, or to accompany others, or to pass themselves off as good Christians, or merely that they may be able to say that they have been to the sermon. Thus they are in the church in which the sermon is preached, but they are, so to speak, not present at the sermon; their bodies are there, but not their minds and hearts, which are occupied with a hundred voluntary distractions, so that they hear the sound of the preacher's voice by the outward organs of sense, and yet un-

derstand little or nothing of what he says. They show clearly enough by their constant looking about at the least noise, by their nodding and bowing to those who come in, and sometimes, too, by going asleep, that they have not brought attentive minds and hearts to the sermon, and that they are not listening with any desire to profit by what they hear. And that is the very result that the spirit of envy, the devil, tries so hard to bring about. He knows what harm the Word of God can do him when it is listened to with a certain amount of attention and eagerness; it fills him with bitter envy to see so many souls thereby freed from his slavery and led to love God zealously; and therefore he tries, in every possible way, when he cannot prevent people from coming to the sermon, at least to distract them, so that they understand little or nothing of it.

II. The second class of those who scatter the seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it can neither strike root nor produce fruit, are the curious, who listen to sermons with great attention, nay, with great pleasure and eagerness, but do not pay any attention to the fundamental truth that is being explained; for they are simply anxious to hear how the preacher treats his subject, but they are not at all concerned about deriving profit for their souls from what they hear. They listen for the sake of an intellectual treat, not to have their wills moved to do good or to avoid evil. They are like those artists who come to the churches to look at the pictures of Christ and the Saints. What do they look at them for? Their chief idea is to see whether the picture is in accordance with the rules of art, how the outlines, shades and colors harmonize with the subject, whether the limbs are in due proportion. But if a pious man comes into the church and looks at the same pictures out of devotion, on his knees and with folded hands, they bring to his mind Christ, or the Saints of God, and excite in him a true sorrow for sin, fervent love of Jesus Christ crucified, and a pro-

found sense of humility and self-abasement by representing to him the lives of the Saints. The others go away as they came; they gained nothing by looking at the pictures, except that they can say: I have seen a beautiful painting in such and such a church.

"Go to the ant" (Prov. 6 : 6), says the Holy Ghost to the slothful and lazy, who lead idle, useless lives, and learn from them how to employ your time. We might say to those curious hearers of the Word of God, "go to the bees," and learn from them how to extract profit and advantage for your souls from sermons. Consider how the bees fly about in the garden, or in the open field. What sort of flowers are they seeking so diligently? Roses, violets, tulips and the like, which lend most beauty to the garden by their varied colors? By no means; those thrifty little creatures do not care much for flowers of that kind; they are not attracted either by their delicious perfume, or their beautiful colors; all they want is honey, that is so useful and so pleasing to the taste. Therefore, it is no matter to them what a flower or herb looks like, whether it grows wild in the fields, or is carefully cultivated in the garden, whether it is red or white, blue or black, sweet or bitter; it is all one to them, as long as they can find the precious honey they are looking for; and when they have found that they are satisfied, for they have attained the object of their desires. "Go to the bees," oh, Christians, and learn from them what you must seek and pay special attention to when you hear a sermon. Learn to seek not the outward pomp and magnificence of words, but the substantial truth that is explained for you, the cogency of the arguments and proofs that are adduced, the infallible authority of the Holy Scripture, and the maxims and sayings of the holy Doctors of the Church which confirm that truth. Whether the truth is sweet or bitter, terrible or consoling, should be a matter of indifference to you if you are concerned about your soul's welfare. The honey that you have to

extract from it, and to bring away with you, is the clear knowledge of your past sins and of the faults that have hitherto escaped you, the impulse to amend your life, zeal in the divine service, and your spiritual advantage. If you do not seek that, the sermon is of no good to you, and you are only wasting your time listening to it; you scatter the precious seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it cannot grow nor take root, and you are playing into the hands of the devil, whose whole effort is to take the Word away from you, "lest, believing, you should be saved."

III. The third and last class of those who let the seed of the Word of God fall by the wayside, and be eaten by the birds, consists of those Christians who are lazy and slothful in the divine service; who immediately forget the truths they have heard. They listen to the sermon, and listen to it with great eagerness and attention; nor are they indifferent to the truths preached to them, which they understand very well, so that they can offer no objections against them; frequently, too, their understandings are enlightened and their wills impelled to change their lives and to amend their faults; but it all lasts only till the end of the sermon; when the preacher leaves the pulpit they forget all he has said; they are just as quick in forgetting as they were in learning, so that, if they were asked on the same evening, or on the following day, whether they remembered anything of the sermon or learned anything from it, they would have to answer that they knew nothing more about it. St. James, in his epistle, compares people of that kind to a man who looks at himself in a glass: for the Word of God is a glass in which the beauty of virtue, the deformity of vice, the gravity of sin, and the actual state of the soul, may be seen. Now, he who hears this Word, and immediately forgets it, is, according to the Apostle, like a man who looks at himself in the glass, and presently goes away and forgets what he is like. "For,"

says the Apostle, "if a man be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was" (James 1 : 23, 24). The hearts of such people are like to a stomach which takes in food and drink with appetite, but rejects them with violence before the process of digestion begins. The food of the soul is the Word of God, but it is rejected, like food taken into a sick stomach, when it does not remain in the memory. Just as it is a certain sign of a weak stomach to reject food and drink, so it is an almost infallible sign of a soul being injured by carelessness in the divine service, when it hears the Word of God, and at once forgets it. That forgetfulness is to be attributed to the fact that, when the sermon is over, those people at once occupy their minds with their usual worldly cares and occupations, and go into company, or engage in conversations which distract them, and prevent them from giving due consideration to the truths they have heard, so as to impress them on the memory.

Ah, some pious souls will probably say with fear and trembling, if it is necessary to keep constantly in the memory what one has heard in sermons, then certainly I am not one of those whom Jesus Christ has pronounced blessed! For, no matter how attentive and eager I am to hear and to retain what I have heard, I still forget it, and am never able to say what I have heard on the preceding Sunday. I have no difficulty in believing that you are speaking the truth, and that there are many who are in the same state as yourselves. But it is not necessary, by any means, to be always able to relate what you have heard in a sermon; I myself could not now tell you exactly what I said in my sermon last Sunday, although I knew it then. It is enough for us that the thing itself—that is, the truth we have learned—remains in the memory; it is not at all necessary for us to be always recalling it to our minds. It is, in fact, an utter

impossibility for us to do that, because we have so many different things to think of during the day. But when an opportunity offers of doing or omitting anything according to the truth we have learned, we must then try to remember that truth and to act according to it; for instance, you have heard a sermon about Christian patience under trials, and you have learned that all crosses, no matter by what name they are called or how they come to us, are to be attributed to God, who, with the best intentions and out of the fulness of his love for us, sends us those crosses for our spiritual good, and is looking on while we are suffering pain and anguish. Now, you do not think of all this for some time after, and you would not be able to say, if you were asked, what proofs, or texts of Scripture, or examples of the Saints, the preacher brought forward to substantiate the truth he was explaining; nor is it necessary that you should be able to do so. But suppose that after an interval of six months some calamity, or sickness, or trouble befalls you; at first you are quite disturbed and bewildered, and you get angry with the person whom you blame for the misfortune that has happened you; but, when you recollect yourself, the thought occurs to you: oh, I heard once in a sermon that all trials come from God, and must therefore be borne with patience and resignation. I acknowledged the truth of that when I heard it, and I also made a resolution to resign myself patiently to the will of God in all troubles. Now I have a fine opportunity of carrying that resolution into effect; I must, then, and will be patient under this trial. You have heard a sermon about the necessity of avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin, because God withdraws his grace from him who, presumptuously and without necessity, ventures into them, and allows him to fall into sin. You forgot that sermon soon after you heard it; but after some time you were invited to an evening party in which many people of both sexes were to meet and spend the time in dancing and amusing themselves. All at

once you remember having heard that such parties are dangerous, and you make up your mind to refuse the invitation politely and to remain at home. You have heard a sermon about detraction, what a grievous sin it is, and how difficult to make proper reparation for; it escapes your memory for a time, until one day you happen to be in company in which people are speaking ill of their neighbor; the sermon occurs to your mind at once; I have heard, you say to yourself, that it is not right, that it is against charity and against the right that my neighbor has to his good name, thus to speak ill of him behind his back; and that the loss he thus suffers in his honor must be made good. Why, then, should I join in this uncharitable conversation? I will hold my tongue and say nothing.

In a word, he who often hears sermons with a good intention, and with an eager desire to profit by them, will always derive some spiritual advantage from them, even though he can never clearly recall them to his memory. A young hermit who once complained to his abbot that his memory was so bad that he could not retain a word of the sermons he heard, although he listened to them eagerly and with a great desire to profit by them, and therefore he was of the opinion that it was simply a loss of time for him to hear sermons. The abbot took two earthen vessels, and, giving one to the young hermit, said: There, go and fill that with water, and when you have washed it quite clean, throw the water out. The young man did so three or four times. Now, said the abbot, which of the two vessels is the cleaner? Of course the one I have washed so often, said the young man. It is just the same with the soul, rejoined the abbot; although the water is at once poured out of the vessel that is washed, still that vessel is cleaner each time. The Word of God is the water provided by him to cleanse souls with; if you hear it constantly and with eagerness, although you imagine that it all escapes your memory at once, and that you can retain none of it, still it always cleanses your soul more

and more from the filth of sin, and makes it more beautiful with virtue and more pleasing to God. I conclude with the same advice: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITH HARD HEARTS.

"*But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.*" —Matt. 8 : 8.

The centurion's faith in Jesus Christ was great, for he looked upon him as the Almighty God, and, instead of asking him to come down to his house, as others did in similar circumstances, he simply made known to our Lord what he wanted: "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented." And when Jesus said, "I will come and heal him," the centurion answered: No, Lord, it is not necessary to go to that trouble; "but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed." There is no doubt that, as the centurion said, nothing is impossible to the Word of God; yet there are Christians nowadays whose hearts are so hardened that not even the Almighty God, who has left man his liberty with regard to good and evil, can penetrate them with that two-edged sword.

There are some hearts so hard and flinty, that no matter how undesirable the truths they hear in sermons are, they cannot be moved to repent of their sins, to change their unchristian habits, and to amend their wicked lives.

St. Paul calls the Word of God a sharp sword; "Take unto

you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephes. 6 : 17), and a sword which penetrates both soul and body. And again he says: "The Word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and of the marrow" (Hebr. 4 : 12). There is no vice that cannot be slain and exterminated by the sword of the Word of God. If pride or vanity impels you to extol yourself above others, take that sword immediately: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3 : 19). Remember who and what you are; you are but a handful of earth, and you will have to return to earth; why should you be proud of your beauty? It is only skin deep, and will one day be the food of worms. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled" (Luke 14 : 11). "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (James 4 : 6). If impure passions and the desires of the flesh assail the soul, take at once the sword of the Word of God: "Neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6 : 9, 10). Impure and sensual souls, "which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Is. 33 : 14.) How will you bear the eternal fires that await your momentary pleasure? If you are tempted to avarice and the greed of temporal things, take the sword of the Word of God at once: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16 : 26.) "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12 : 20.) Why do you torment yourself, and grub in the earth like a mole? Perhaps this very night your soul will be hurried into eternity. If the perverse world tries to lead you astray by its scandalous fashions and vain usages, take at once the sword of the Word of God: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world" (John 2 : 15). "Whosoever will be a friend of the world, becometh

an enemy of God" (James 4 : 4). If the calamities and miseries of life assail you, disturb your heart and mind, and threaten to drive you into despair, arm yourself at once with the sword of the Word of God: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5 : 5). "The world shall rejoice, and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16 : 20); your sorrow will last but a short time, and will then be exchanged for eternal joy: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8 : 18).

But all this is of no good to those hard-hearted people of whom we are speaking. The sword may strike where it wills; it cannot penetrate. They hear of the magnificent promises of an exceeding great reward for virtue, and threats of eternal punishment in hell that awaits sinners, of the uncertainty, and the speedy approach of an unforeseen and unprovided death, and of the strict judgment that will follow it. But nothing can touch their hearts; they are incapable of being softened; they go home from the sermon with the same hearts and minds that they brought to it.

The human heart, at first, while it is still innocent, is, so to speak, a soft dough, which can be easily shaped and moulded into any form by the divine inspirations, by the teaching and instruction given by parents, and by the exhortations of preachers and confessors to virtue and piety. That is the proper time, too, for parents to fulfil the important duty and obligation which God has imposed on them, and which they voluntarily have taken upon themselves, under pain of eternal damnation, of keeping their children from all dangers and occasions of sin, and, after the example of the elder Tobias, training them from their very childhood to fear God, to love him, and to serve him alone: "And from his infancy he taught him to fear God, and to abstain from all sin" (Tob. 1 : 10).

If one who is still innocent learns to know evil through the

carelessness or bad example of his parents, or through the influence of wicked companions, and falls into grievous sin, then, alas! the crust begins to form itself around the dough; the first tenderness of conscience, the modesty and the softness of the heart disappear. Still the heart may yet be moved without difficulty, and be brought on a better way. A single thought on the part of the uneasy, gnawing conscience, that cries out, as it generally does in one's earlier years: Unhappy man, what have you done? where are you going to? You have lost your soul, offended God, forfeited heaven, and lost all! A single word on the part of his confessor, to show him the deformity and the grievous malice of sin, and the severe punishment that awaits it; a single sermon that speaks to him of God and of divine truths, may be a sharp knife that cuts into his heart and moves it to sorrow and repentance. But if he afterwards gets into other temptations and occasions of sin, so that he falls frequently, then the crust gets harder and harder; the former horror and dread of mortal sin disappear gradually, until at length the sin becomes habitual, the voice of conscience is hushed, and the sinner feels quite at ease in his miserable state. The good inspirations of God and of his angel guardian find no hearing any longer, the exhortations and threats of parents, confessors and preachers cannot frighten him; the great truths of the certainty and uncertainty of death, of the strict judgments of God, of the eternal joys of heaven, of the undying fires of hell, cannot reach his heart or soften it, because he has heard them often before. Not that the knife has lost its sharpness and power, for the Word of God is always a two-edged sword; but it cannot penetrate the hard and flinty heart. Therefore, with people of that kind the Word of God falls on a rock, and through want of moisture dries up and produces no fruit.

2. There is another class of hearers of the Word of God who are not altogether hard, who hear the Word of God with eagerness and satisfaction, and who are even impressed by it, so that

they are moved to do good and to avoid evil; but not every truth that is preached to them has that effect; in some things they are so hard and flinty that nothing can touch their hearts. There are certain vices, certain abuses to which they are addicted, and which, as they have persuaded themselves, are of no great harm, they do not intend to amend. With regard to those vices and abuses the Gospel truths are powerless; before the sermon has well commenced they have already hardened their hearts and fully determined to take no notice of anything that is said against their pet failings; and when they hear anything of the kind they at once distract their minds from the sermon by thinking of something else; or else they listen to it, but laugh at it in their hearts. You may say what you like, they think, you will not persuade me in this matter; I will believe you in other things, but as far as this is concerned you may preach till to-morrow without making any impression on me, for I have fully made up my mind not to change.

Therefore, they listen with pleasure to a sermon in praise of certain practices of devotion and virtue, which they are accustomed to perform, or against certain vices they are not much given to, such as cursing, swearing, blasphemy, detraction, drunkenness, injustice, adultery and the like. Oh, excellent! they say, when they hear those vices sharply spoken of; that sermon is very practical; it is a pity so and so is not here; those are really fundamental truths that the preacher is explaining. But if their own bad and vicious habits are attacked; for instance, the deplorable carelessness of many parents who train up their sons and daughters to vanity and idleness, extravagance and indecency in dress, the dangerous company and evening parties in which both sexes meet, not only to squander away in an unchristian and wicked manner, in dancing, gambling and folly, the precious time that was given them for the sole purpose of saving their souls, but who, too, sacrifice their hearts to the perverse world, the corrupt flesh, and, as a matter

of course, to the devil, too; if the preacher ventures to say that all outward works of piety, such as prayer, hearing Mass, visiting the churches, confession and Communion are of no good as long as one disobeys the precepts of God or of the Church, even in one particular, or as long as one is not ready always to follow the divine will when it is made known to him, and so on; oh, then it is a different matter altogether! The preacher might have held his tongue about that, they think; he is only making decent people ashamed, and disturbing consciences unnecessarily, and filling them with scruples; he is too coarse and blunt; he does not know how respectable people must live in the world; he cannot draw the line between them and the common herd.

The only fruit they reap from the Word of God is anger, displeasure and bitterness against the preacher, a still greater hardness of heart, and a firmer determination not to amend their lives in spite of what they have heard. They resemble the high-priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, who, although Jesus Christ, the Teacher of all teachers, preached to them himself in the most forcible manner, condemning their pride, deceitfulness and hypocrisy, yet derived no fruit from what they heard, except to become still more embittered against Jesus Christ, who was so anxious for their spiritual welfare; so that they more than once took up stones to throw at him, until at length they became so hardened and obdurate in wickedness that they condemned the innocent Son of God to be nailed to the shameful Cross as a public malefactor. The only comfort to me and to other preachers under those circumstances is this very example of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who, as the eternal Wisdom, foresaw with unerring certainty that his preaching would only make the Scribes and Pharisees more embittered and obdurate, nevertheless continued to preach to them, and to condemn severely their sins and vices.

Many of these people are not satisfied with being themselves

so hard-hearted in certain things that they do not profit by sermons; they cannot even bear to see others profiting by such sermons, and therefore they try to have as many companions as possible in their unlawful customs and abuses, that they may indulge therein with all the more freedom. To this end they spare neither adverse comment nor ridicule against the preacher, when they are in company, so as to lessen his authority; they agree among themselves to adhere to their customs with all the greater pertinacity; they laugh at those who, having seen the truth, renounce and amend those abuses; they always speak of them as simple, unsophisticated people, who do not know how to live like the rest of the world.

But does it then follow that those people must absent themselves from sermons altogether, and think: oh, what is the use of my going to a sermon? it will not do me the least good! Not by any means. On the contrary, they should hear sermons constantly, because it may be that the reason of their obduracy with regard to certain vices is the fact that they seldom, and with frequent interruptions, and only when their humor takes them, hear the Word of God. There is not much good in people of that kind hearing the Word of God now and then; one or two sermons will not make any impression on them; nothing but emphatic and oft-repeated exhortation and instruction will enable them to overcome their bad habits. But no matter how hard a heart is, it must at last be softened and brought to a knowledge of the truth by being frequently touched by the Word of God. A strong fortress cannot be taken at the first, second, or third assault; but it can be taken after a long siege, when the garrison has been starved out.

A holy man being once asked what was the best way to convert a hard-hearted sinner, replied: "Water is by nature soft, but stone hard;" yet no stone is so hard that if water constantly drops on it from a height it will not be eventually worn away and bored through; "so also the Word of God is soft and gentle,

and our hearts are hard." Consequently, if a man hears the Word of God frequently and constantly, it is hardly possible that his heart will not at last be softened and penetrated, so that he will fear God and love him (Ezech. 36 : 25).

Was not the heart of Augustine as hard as a stone, and so habituated to pride and sensual indulgence that, as he himself publicly acknowledges, he had so much difficulty in the beginning of his conversion that it seemed to him an utter impossibility to abstain from vice? Yet by hearing frequently the Word of God in the sermons of St. Ambrose, that flinty heart became softened and impressed, so that it glowed with the love of God in a most remarkable manner; in consequence of which St. Augustine is often represented as holding a burning heart in his hand.

If any of you here present is a hard-hearted sinner, to him I would say, with all possible earnestness: my dear Christian, whatever you do, no matter how deep you are sunk in vice, do not on any account absent yourself from sermons! Come regularly, and, if you feel no inclination or desire to repent, at least beg of God in the beginning of the sermon to give you a desire of repentance; offer to him your obdurate heart, and beg of him to soften it according to his will, and to give you the grace to know and repent of your sins, that you may enter after your death into heaven, and be happy for ever and ever. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO HEAR SERMONS PROPERLY.

"But the men wondered, saying: Who is this, for the winds, and the sea obey him?"—Matt. 8 : 27

Such is the wonderful power of the Word of God; such is the wonderful effect and fruit it produces when one willingly obeys it. We have hitherto treated of three different kinds of hearers who derive little or no profit for their souls from the Word of God in sermons, because the seed falls either on the public wayside, or on a hard rock, or amongst thorns. Now we come to the fourth and select class of really good hearers, with whom the seed falls on good ground and brings forth fruit a hundredfold, with whom Christ concludes his parable: "But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience" (Luke 8 : 15).

How those good hearers of the Word of God may be recognized, and what abundant fruit they derive from sermons; but how small their number.

Who are they that hear the Word of God in sermons with a good, very good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience? We can recognize and distinguish them from other hearers of the Word of God in the same way in which Solomon distinguished natural flowers from artificial. The queen of Saba, wishing to test Solomon's knowledge, proposed to him different riddles and difficult questions, one of which was to decide which of two

bouquets of flowers that she presented to him was natural and which artificial; the artificial one she had caused to be made with such consummate skill that it could not be distinguished from a natural bouquet by sight, touch or smell. What did Solomon do? He had a number of bees and flies brought into the room, and then looked carefully to see on which bouquet they would settle down; for he knew that the bees would alight on the natural flowers, and the flies on the artificial. In the same way, in a congregation of Christians assembled to hear a sermon, there are different hearers of the Word of God; some are earnest and sincere, others are false and hypocritical hearers. Outwardly they resemble each other, and one can hardly distinguish between them. But he who wishes to know to which class he belongs must look carefully at his own heart in order to see whether it retains the wholesome doctrine and the Gospel truths he has heard, which, like bees, settle on it, to suck from it the precious honey of good works, or whether the devil, whose imps, like flies, are continually buzzing about, takes away the Word from the heart, so that it produces no fruit. If he finds the latter to be the case, he can conclude with certainty that he belongs to the number of those false hearers of the Word of God, of whom there are three kinds; if the former, he may congratulate himself on being in the number of the good, sincere and select hearers, who receive the Word of God in a good, very good heart, and bring forth abundant spiritual fruit. But there are still clearer signs by which to distinguish good hearers of the Word of God by their fruit:

I. A good Christian seeks the Word that he may use it for his own correction and amendment;

II. That he may be enlightened with knowledge;

III. That he may be strengthened to practise virtue;

IV. That he may conform to it so as to beautify himself;

V. That he may enjoy it as his consolation.

I. A good hearer of the Word of God seeks and hears it for his own correction and amendment. That is, he comes to the sermon with an honest, sincere desire to discover his hidden faults and failings, and to be moved to repentance for his known faults, and to a lasting amendment of them. Thus he does not, like some, avoid going to those sermons in which he knows by experience that the truth will be told them very plainly in order to induce them to amend their lives; so great is their fear of hearing their faults and secret vices condemned; or who, when they go to sermons and feel their consciences disturbed, go away filled with anger and bitterness toward the preacher, and villify and abuse him, like a dog barking at a person who throws a stone at him. No; quite different are the dispositions of a good Christian desirous of salvation. He is quite anxious and willing to hear his faults; he earnestly desires to amend them, and therefore he listens with pleasure and inward satisfaction to the earnest reproof, the sharp threat, the just anger and displeasure at sin and vice that the preacher gives expression to. Good! he thinks, when going home after the sermon; that suits me exactly; the preacher has certainly told me the plain truth; now I know where I was wrong.

II. A good Christian seeks the Word of God that he may be enlightened with knowledge. How rare the knowledge of divine things is amongst the greater number of men! In spite of its usefulness and necessity, there are few who trouble themselves about it. There are many, indeed, who have a sort of speculative knowledge of these things; but in practice, in their lives and actions, they show that they understand little or nothing about them. Heaven should be preferred to earth, eternal things to temporal and transitory, the precious soul to the corruptible body, the divine law to the usages and maxims of the vain world, and God to every one and everything. That they all know and make open profession of; but meanwhile they

live in such forgetfulness of God, neglect of their souls, disregard of heaven and heavenly things, as if they were to live on this earth forever. They transgress daily the divine commands and heap up sin on sin with as little concern as if the Almighty God, who is present everywhere and sees even our most secret thoughts, were a mere poetic fiction, a fable! St. Augustine says in his "Confessions": "Unhappy the man who knows all created things, but does not know God; and happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long as he knows God."

It is for the sake of this knowledge, and to make a practical use of it, that a Christian who is really desirous of salvation hears the Word of God in sermons constantly and with attention. He knows well that this is not the work of one or two days, of one or two instructions such as are given in sermons, and therefore he comes to this divine school as regularly and frequently as possible, so as not to miss a single lesson. He is far different from those who come only now and then, and who are like truant schoolboys that go to school one day and stay at home four, and who know nothing at the end of the year. No; he who is desirous of saving his soul will come constantly to sermons. For it is thus that he can learn what he has to value and what to despise, what to hate and avoid, what to seek and to love. Thus he will learn to prize heavenly and eternal things and to despise the perishable things of earth; to fear and hate sin alone above every other evil; to love and honor God alone above every other good; to avoid and shun the least shadow of an occasion of sin; to desire and seek his eternal salvation with the greatest care. Thus his memory and understanding will be deeply impressed with oft-repeated exhortations to fear God on account of his strict justice, to love him for his infinite goodness and mercy, to adore him with the greatest reverence on account of his omnipresence, to serve him with all possible zeal and fidelity on account of his infinite power, to have a childlike confidence in him and the greatest resigna-

tion to his will under all circumstances, on account of the wonderful and all-wise arrangements of his Providence. "Happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long as he knows God!"

III. A good Christian seeks the Word of God that he may be strengthened to practise virtue. No matter what supernatural and divine light a man receives, no matter how great his knowledge of heavenly things and how strong his resolution to avoid even the least sin, he is still liable to experience the effects of the weakness and inconstancy he has inherited from our forefather Adam, on account of which he is always in need of something to renew his courage and strength. Self-love is liable to get fatigued and disgusted with the difficulties that are to be met with in the way of virtue, and consequently to oppose the good resolutions that are made by the will; the evil inclinations and desires of the flesh rise up in violent rebellion against reason and the knowledge of the understanding; the devil is unceasingly at work with his evil suggestions and temptations; the world, with its false maxims, with its flatteries and its ridicule, is capable of perverting even the most pious man, and leading him away from the path of virtue. Now, the constant and attentive hearing of the Word of God in sermons is the very thing that gives to the heart that strength which enables one who is desirous of salvation to persevere in the way of virtue and in his good resolutions, in spite of his natural weakness and inconstancy, and the attacks and wiles of all the enemies of virtue.

IV. A good Christian seeks the Word of God in order to conform to it so as to beautify his soul. A good man who sincerely desires to serve God is not at all satisfied with merely avoiding all mortal sin, which completely destroys the bond of friendship between the soul and God, but he cannot bear the least fault or defect that is displeasing to God, whom he loves

above all things. Nor is he satisfied with being free from all deliberate venial sin; he endeavors as far as possible to become like to Jesus Christ, by imitating his life. A twofold beauty is caused in the soul by the Word of God, when it is heard with a good heart. "Now you are clean by reason of the Word which I have spoken to you" (John 15 : 3). That is to say, he who constantly hears the Word of God in sermons, with sincere desire to profit by it, acquires, as a general rule, in virtue of such oft-repeated exhortations and graces, such a horror, disgust and fear of offending God, that he would almost be as unwilling to commit a deliberate venial sin as a careless Christian or a worldling would to forfeit the friendship of God by a mortal sin.

V. Finally, a good Christian seeks the Word of God that he may enjoy it as his consolation. Nothing is sweeter or more agreeable to one who loves than to converse with the object of his affection, and the longer this lasts, and the oftener it takes place, the better is he pleased. In the same way, he who has experienced how sweet the Lord is, finds special comfort and consolation in speaking with God, and in frequently hearing his Word, so that he is never tired of hearing it. The sermon never seems too long, but nearly always too short for them. They go to hear it with far greater desire than the vain children of the world have for their balls and parties. In fact, they almost live on the Word of God, according to what our Lord says: "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4 : 4). This was the better part that Magdalen chose when she left all household cares to seat herself at the feet of Jesus, her divine Teacher, and to hear what he had to say to her. This is that heavenly sweetness in comparison with which all the joys and pleasures of the world are but bitterness, and of which David says: "How sweet are thy words to my palate, more than honey

to my mouth" (Ps. 118 : 103). This is the good soil which produces fruit a hundredfold from the seed of the Word of God; these are the good hearers, who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it.

1. Let us now reflect a little on what we have hitherto learned of this subject. The first thought that occurs to me is this: if we take out of the whole congregation those alone who are regular in hearing the Word of God in the sermons, how many would there be? Certainly a very small number in comparison to the remaining parishioners. Now, if we divide this latter and smaller number into four parts, we shall find that only one part will hear the Word of God in a good heart, so as to derive spiritual profit from it; but the remaining three parts will not profit by it at all, because the seed will fall either by the wayside, where it will be trodden under foot or be eaten by the birds; or on a rock, where it will dry up for want of moisture; or among thorns, which will choke it. Is not that true? Yes, and we have the infallible word of Jesus Christ to confirm it. Therefore, if they who are of God hear his Word, and if they alone who hear it with profit to their souls can be counted among the sheep of the fold of Christ who hear his voice, then all the others must be among the reprobate, since the devil takes the Word out of their hearts, "lest, believing, they should be saved." Alas, what a terrible consequence follows! For "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20 : 16).

2. The second thought that occurs to me is: if among the small number of those who hear the Word of God regularly three-fourths derive no profit from it, what spiritual profit can one expect those tepid Christians to make who seldom or never come to sermons, although they have time and opportunity enough to do so? And what will become of those who avoid the sermons solely that they may be able to continue in sin without having their consciences disturbed? And what of those who are not satisfied with losing the Word of God themselves,

but try to keep others also from hearing it? What of those parents who hinder their sons and daughters from often hearing the Word of God, although they are anxious to hear it, and that with the hellish intention of preventing their children from being too pious? I would not willingly take the place of those people at the judgment-seat and answer for them! At all events, if you are determined not to learn good yourselves, nor to do it, nor to go to heaven, you should not close the way to others who wish to save their souls.

3. The third and last inference each one of you must draw for yourselves. You must ask yourselves: To what class do I belong? Am I of the number of those who seldom or never hear the Word of God? Alas, if that is the case, you are not among the chosen sheep of Jesus Christ, who hear his voice and obey it; and the terrible words of Christ are applicable to you: "Therefore, you hear them not, because you are not of God" (John 8 : 47). You must, then, amend your conduct in this respect, and from this day forward hear the Word of God as regularly as your circumstances will allow. If you belong to one of the three classes of men who indeed hear sermons regularly, but derive no profit from them, because the seed falls by the wayside, or on the hard rock, or among thorns, and therefore cannot produce fruit, you have just as little reason to expect that things will go well with you, for you shall have to render to God a strict account of the graces and inspirations that you have neglected, and of the many times that you knowingly disobeyed the divine will; therefore, you must do better in future; you must hear the Word of God with eagerness and attention, and always make a practical use of the truths that you shall learn. Do you belong to the fourth class, to the number of those who hear the Word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart? Can you say with truth that you have hitherto heard sermons regularly, with an earnest desire to learn something good from them, and that, having learned it,

you have tried to practise it? If that is the case, you can rejoice with all your heart, and comfort yourself with the thought that you have one of the surest proofs of being elected to eternal happiness, according to the words of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE IMPURE TONGUE.

"*His enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat.*" —Matt. 13 : 25.

What we read in the parable of to-day's Gospel happens only too often amongst us, to the great injury of souls. We know and experience what a number of weeds grow up in us without any labor on our part; I mean the many temptations and solicitations to evil that come from our own wicked propensities and inclinations, and that strive to cause the eternal ruin of our souls, especially in the matter of impurity; and yet there are wicked, malicious men, who deliberately sow cockle, for the still greater ruin of souls, by placing impure objects before the eyes of others, by betraying them into sin through bad example and by impure conversation; so that they who wish to preserve chaste hearts cannot be sufficiently on their guard. Against these latter enemies of souls I mean to speak to-day.

Of all the wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity must be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.

I. No wicked tongue leads to greater sin than the impure

tongue. The ranker a weed is, and the deeper it takes root, the more does it spread itself over the ground, and therefore the greater, too, is the mischief done by sowing a weed of that kind in cultivated ground. In the same way, the more wicked a vice is, the deeper and quicker it takes root in the soul, and the more difficult it is to eradicate it afterwards; so, also, the greater the injury done to the soul by him who deliberately betrays another into a vice of that kind, or brings him into the occasion of it. Cursers, who daily speak the language of hell toward each other, harm only their own souls and bring maledictions down on themselves; they cannot injure the innocent by all their curses and imprecations. Perjurers, who so often give themselves up to the devil by swearing false oaths—whom do they injure but themselves? They may now and then cause their neighbor to suffer temporal loss, but they cannot hurt his soul. Uncharitable and slanderous tongues, that are given to speak of the affairs of others, and to criticise their faults, they are truly wicked and dangerous tongues; yet they attack only the good name and reputation of others, but cannot, with all their uncharitable talk, so injure them as to make them worse in the sight of God than they are. Tale-bearing tongues, who secretly carry stories from one to another, relating to one what another has said or done against him—how often do they not cause enmity and strife between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children, friends and relatives! Yet they cannot directly hurt their souls. Blasphemous tongues vent their anger against God and his Saints when they speak slightingly and disrespectfully of them, yet the only effect their wicked language has on the minds of others is to fill them with fear and dread, lest a thundrebolt should fall from heaven and strike them dead on the spot. The impure tongue is not satisfied with bringing eternal damnation on its own soul, but it must also sow in the ears and hearts of those who listen to it the cockle, which it may take them a lifetime to eradicate; for

by its impure discourses it leads many innocent souls into the greatest and most dangerous vices.

Nothing is more dangerous and more apt to lead to sin, says St. Paul, than wicked conversation: "Be not seduced; evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15 : 33). They are like a consuming canker, as he writes to his disciple Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they grow much toward ungodliness, and their speech spreadeth like a canker" (2 Tim. 2 : 16, 17)—that is, they creep through the ears into the heart, and keep gnawing at it until they get it to consent to a sinful pleasure. All wicked conversation, and even unspiritual and vain talk has that effect. What mischief, then, must not be caused by impure tongues in the human heart, which is already of itself prone to sensual indulgence? It is hardly possible for any one to talk impurely in company without committing a mortal sin, either on account of the scandal given by such discourses, especially when the hearers are still innocent, or on account of the danger of consenting to a bad thought about the impure subject that is spoken of. And what is said of impure conversation is also to be understood of impure songs, which are all the more dangerous than mere conversation, as they are more apt to fill the heart with their poison, to inflame the imagination, and to fix the subject more strongly in the hearer's memory.

And yet, alas, how common such songs and such conversation are in the world nowadays! It seems that people imagine they can have no pleasure, nor amusement, and cannot carry on an entertaining conversation, without bringing in those filthy topics. Like unclean swine, they delight in wallowing in the mud; they are not satisfied, like other animals, with merely touching it with the soles of their feet; they must roll their whole bodies in it. There are even parents to be found who not only use such filthy language in presence of their innocent children, but actually encourage them to sing unchaste

songs, whereby the children lose all sense of modesty, even before they understand the meaning of the words they use, and when they grow up they listen without shame to things that would otherwise have brought a blush to their cheeks.

What a disgrace that is! We have received our tongues for the sole purpose that we may use them as instruments to praise God, yet we misuse the noble member to turn souls away from God, and to lead them into sin by impure conversation. And our tongues are so often moistened with the sacred, virginal, and spotless flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! Therefore St. Paul says that we must not even name impurity: "fornication and all uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints" (Ephes. 5 : 3), such as all Christians should be. We abstain as far as possible from coughing and spitting in decent company, but we do not hesitate to bespatter those who are listening to us with the mire of our impure tongues.

Oh, wicked tongues, what a fearful account you will have to render, not only for yourselves and for the sins you commit by impure conversations, but also for the souls that you have betrayed into sin! Striking was the example given by our Lord in the public street. He was surrounded by a great crowd of people, when he saw a little child passing by. Christ called the child, took him by the hand, and "set him in the midst of them" (Matt. 18 : 2). The people were surprised, and, expecting to hear something wonderful from him, they were all attention. Then our Lord, pointing to the child, said in earnest tones: "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea." Therefore, "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!" (Matth. 18 : 6, 7.) Woe, then, to you, unchaste tongues, that scandalize so many innocent souls!

In truth, if any one is marked for eternal damnation it is the man who is given to impure conversation. It is a mark of rep-

robation for one to have the habit of returning easily to his former wickedness, and after confession to fall again into the same grievous sins. This mark is certainly to be seen in him who is in the habit of speaking impurely, because he always falls back into sin, and bespatters every one he associates with with his foul conversation. The second mark of reprobation is to love sin, and to find pleasure in it. There is many a one who sins through human frailty; but he knows that he has done wrong, and he is ashamed of and sorry for his grievous transgressions; but the unchaste man, who is given to immoral conversation, glories in his sins; he relates them for the purpose of making others laugh; he actually makes a boast of them; and therefore he has not sorrow, or detestation, or repentance, but affection and love for his sins. The third mark of reprobation is to act as an agent of the devil by leading souls astray, and bringing eternal ruin on the lambs of the fold of Jesus Christ. The impure-tongued man, by his filthy songs and discourses, leads many an innocent soul into sin, takes it away from God, and delivers it up to the devil; so that he will have to pay soul for soul. The fourth sign of reprobation is the habit of impurity. Now, it is not a rash judgment to look upon him who is always speaking of impure things as addicted to that vice, for his heart and mind must be a cesspool of vice, since his mouth gives forth the effluvium of unchaste conversation. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12 : 34), and he is not far from committing the act who delights to speak of it. The fifth sign of reprobation is the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, for what greater indignity can be offered to it than to allow the tongue on which it is so often placed to wallow in the filth of impure talk! How many ceremonies, prayers, blessings, and anointings the bishop uses in consecrating the fingers of the priest's hand, which are to hold the virginal body of Jesus Christ! But our tongues, when the blessed salt is put on them in Baptism, are already

consecrated by God himself as altars, patens, and chalices, to receive the sacred flesh and blood of the Son of God. Now, if a person were to take the chalice in which the blood of Jesus has been even once consecrated, and to fill it with filth, the very thought of such an enormity makes us shudder! What a fearful profanation must it not then be to receive the bread of Angels in a mouth or a tongue that is always reeking with impurity. Therefore, he who is given to unchaste conversation has all the marks of reprobation. Woe, then, to that man!

But, they say, God forbid that we should have a bad intention when we speak now and then in that way! Our only object is to amuse ourselves and others, and not at all to lead people into sin. Oh, certainly, it is an amusement that the devil takes delight in! Your intention cannot excuse you in things that are of themselves scandalous and unlawful. But we are careful not to allow those who are still innocent to hear such conversation; when we speak in that way, we do it among ourselves, in the company of people who know as much about it as we do, so that there is no danger of giving scandal. What? No danger of giving scandal? Do you know what scandal-giving is? It means saying or doing, even with signs, anything that is of a nature capable of leading others into sin, even if it were only a sin of thought. Now, when you talk impurely and describe impure actions, how can they who are listening to you help seeing in their imaginations the abominations that form the subject of your songs or conversation? And in that way, how can they and you help having impure thoughts and desires? Is not that giving scandal? But you say that the people you talk to know as much about it as you do; if so, then you do not strive to kindle a fire where there was none before; but, at all events, you add more fuel to the fire that is already burning, so that it blazes up more fiercely and burns longer. Is not that giving scandal?

But, they say again, we do not speak in coarse terms, like

drunken boors in a saloon. We use polished language, and veil our meaning by allusions and similes, which the innocent do not understand. Truly, shameless as you are, you do not dare to vomit forth your obscenity in decent company without trying to hide its hideousness somewhat. And this is, unfortunately, a diabolical style of conversation that is much in vogue among ladies and gentlemen of good standing in society. But do you know what I think of it? Such artfully veiled allusions are much more dangerous, scandalous, and abominable than the coarse obscenity of the ignorant boor. And why? A violent wind sometimes extinguishes a fire, while a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, when coarse expressions are used in speaking of impure topics, the resepctable man who hears them feels ashamed, and even if he has a secret pleasure in listening, he still tries to look displeased, for the sake of outward decency; thus the other is reduced to silence, and the impure conversation comes to an end. But when similar talk is carried on by means of artful allusions and metaphors, then there is question of showing how clever one is; no one wishes to be looked on as stupid; all join in the laugh, even they who do not know what it is about; one allusion is brought forward after another, and the obscenity is protracted for hours. If an impure subject is spoken of in coarse and plain words, every one knows what is meant without further study; but when the filth is covered by metaphorical expressions, one has to set his wits to work to find out the meaning of the speaker, and so all sorts of impure images are formed in the imagination, worse sometimes than the speaker intends; the fire of impurity burns fiercer in the heart, and the artful metaphor takes fast hold of the mind.

Pious Christians, and especially you who are still innocent, if you wish to keep your purity untarnished, then fly, for God's sake, all company in which those wicked people appear, and all companions who say the least word that savors of impurity.

If any one tries to lead you into sin by flatteries or caresses accompanied by impure conversation, give him the same answer that St. Francis de Sales gave a shameless woman who once assailed him in that way. And what was his answer? He spat in her face, and turned away from her. If you are not courageous enough, or zealous enough for the glory of God to do that, then at least show by your manner that you cannot bear to listen to unchaste conversation. The schoolfellows of St. Bernardine used to relate of him that his horror of immodest talk was so well known that if any of them were engaged in it and saw him approach they would cry out, "be silent; Bernardine is coming." Nor should you forget that God and your holy angel are present, and that they hear the shameful talk that is going on.

Christian parents, be careful in presence of your children! Do not, on any account, say the least thing that might tarnish their innocence and purity. Often think what it is to have immortal souls entrusted to your care, that you may lead them to God, and what a fearful responsibility you incur if by your negligence they are betrayed into the clutches of the devil! Let all remember the words of St. Paul already quoted: Let all uncleanness be not so much as named among you, as becometh saints. Let us use our tongues for no other end but that for which God gave them to us—that is, to praise and bless God; and let that be our business on earth, as it will be our only occupation in heaven. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

SLOTH IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which is the least indeed of all seeds; but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree."—Matth. 13 : 31, 32.

How can the kingdom of heaven be like to a grain of mustard seed? How can that immense and boundless kingdom be compared to a small seed? By the mustard-seed we may understand Christ himself, or the Catholic Church, or the Gospel of Christ and its propagation throughout the world. But we can also understand the mustard-seed to mean every good work of the just man; for as the mustard-seed is very small in itself, but has such strength that it grows to be a lofty tree, so also the good works that we perform in the state of grace, considered in themselves, are small indeed, but nevertheless they are powerful enough to gain heaven and God himself as the reward. But I must complain bitterly of the folly and madness of most people, who lose and neglect an eternity of happiness, either by continuing in the state of sin, or by their sloth and tepidity in good works. How little is thought of that? Small and trifling things, as we imagine them to be, by which we could frequently please God and gain heaven. Small and trifling things, in which we often offend God and lose an eternal reward; these things are generally looked upon as of no account, and against this sloth and tepidity in the service of God I mean to speak to-day and say: He who neglects small things in the service of God is in a dangerous state,

I. Because God can have no pleasure in him;
II. Because he can have no pleasure in God.

I. Suppose you have servants in the house to wait on you. They do what you tell them, but they do not do all; they are faithful in many things, but now and then they take sides with your neighbor, who is an enemy of yours. They look after your comfort and welfare, but now and then they take little things out of the house without your consent. They do their work, but in some instances according to their own ideas, how and when they wish, and not how and when they are told to do it. Now I ask you, are you satisfied with such servants? Are they just what you want? No, you say; I do not want such people in my house at all. But why not? It is only in little things that they act against your will; it is only in certain things that they refuse obedience. No matter, you say; I do not want them; if I hire a servant, I expect him to do what I tell him, exactly as I tell him; and he must be as faithful to me in one thing as in another. And you are quite right, too!

But tell me now, is God, perhaps, less a master than you? Has he less right to command us mortals than you have to command your servants? Has he less right to our service and obedience than you have to theirs? Perhaps he does not care much if we now and then go over to his adversary, or serve him, according to our own inclinations. The first commandment teaches us quite the contrary: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke 11 : 27). Not half-heartedly, not partially, not incompletely; but with thy whole heart, above all things, in all things, nothing excepted, in the least things as well as the greatest.

Now, it is evident enough that he does not serve God in this way who disregards small things, as he imagines them to be, now and then, in the divine service, although they may in re-

ality be small things; for he does not accomplish the will of God in all things, but reserves some things for himself, since he does not do them when and how God wishes them to be done. They make nothing of small things, or what they imagine to be small things, although they are frequently and in reality of great importance. They do not seek God with all their hearts; they do something for the soul, but they also allow the flesh a good deal of satisfaction; they strive to practise virtue to a certain extent, but at the same time they indulge in vice. They observe the law of God, and also fulfil the law of the vain world; they try to please God, and at the same time to refuse nothing to their sensuality; in one thing they serve God, in another the devil. What they want is some way to heaven that is not marked down in the Gospel of Christ; a way that is neither too broad or too narrow; they try to build a city midway between Jerusalem and Babylon, in which the love of God and the love of self may be on an equal footing. Can God be pleased with such servants? No, he cannot. "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other" (Matth. 6 : 24). "He that is not with me, is against me" (Matt. 12 : 30).

We hope to possess the great God for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven, and yet we refuse to give ourselves completely to him for a few short years on earth! Do we not, then, deserve to have no part in him either on earth or in heaven? Alas! yes, says St. Augustine, that must be the end of it, according to the threat pronounced by our Lord himself: "I know thy works; that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Apoc. 3 : 15, 16). Hear this, tepid Christians, who neglect small things in the service of God, who divide your hearts, and keep one part for God, and the other for the devil, the world and your own sensuality, so that you offer to God only half service:

because you are neither hot nor cold, but tepid. Can the great God be satisfied with such a half-hearted service? No, you do not and cannot please him. His desire is that his holy will be done in all things without exception, with the greatest exactness. I have found a man according to my own heart, says he, speaking of his servant David, because "he shall do all my wills" (Acts 13 : 22), in small things as well as in great. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater" (Luke 16 : 10). So that God has no pleasure in him who disregards small things in his service, and who, even in one or two things only, does not try to do his will with all diligence.

II. A man of that kind, no matter how pious and devout he may be otherwise, can have no pleasure in God, for God cannot please him who does not please God. If I see a servant who is continually unfaithful to his master, even in small things, who is always disobedient and obstinate in certain matters, and who refuses to do as he is told, whenever he is inclined to differ with his master, although he sees that the latter is displeased with him on that account, I must necessarily conclude that such a servant has little love and respect for his master, and cares little about his favor and good opinion. Certainly, if I have a genuine love for a person, I would be afraid to do the least thing to displease him, and I would do all in my power to give him pleasure; if he only gives the slightest sign that he wishes me to do something for him, I am quite delighted to do it, no matter what trouble it may cost me.

How do we know that a man is avaricious and fond of money? For instance, a man has a bag full of gold; he is very careful of it and keeps it under lock and key, so that it may not be stolen; what do you think of him? Is he avaricious? Another man has inherited thirty thousand dollars; he runs to and fro, and gives himself no end of trouble to secure the pos-

session of this legacy; would you look on that man as avaricious, and say, oh, what a miser he is? No, you would do the very same yourself, for you would think that such a large sum of money is well worth the trouble; and even the most prodigal of men would be unwilling to lose it. But if you see that the same man is just as greedy of a small amount as he is of a large sum, that he disputes about a penny, that he is willing to get out of bed at night and to open the door for the sake of a few pence, and that he looks at every penny twice before he spends it, oh, you would say, that man is a regular miser: there is no doubt that he is fond of money. If, on the other hand, he neglects small things in his business, so that he will hardly rise from his chair to make a few pence, and does not care if he loses a dollar now and then, oh, you think, he does not care much for money; nor is he a provident man, for he is too ready in spending what he has.

The same is to be said of a Christian with regard to the love and service of God. There is many a one who is neither a murderer, nor an adulterer, nor a blasphemer, nor given to cursing, nor does he cheat or rob others—in a word, he does nothing and will do nothing that he knows to be a mortal sin; but is he earnest and zealous in the divine service? Has he a real, sincere love for God? I am not yet certain of that by any means; for the sins he avoids are grievous mortal sins, and must be avoided by every one who wishes to save his soul and go to heaven. But if I find that he is just as careful in avoiding venial sin, that he is equally diligent in performing the least of his obligations to God, and that he does at once what he knows to be pleasing to God, then I must acknowledge that he really loves God with his whole heart, and that he is determined to go to heaven. But, on the other hand, does he commit venial sin without fear or shame, does he adhere to certain pactices or customs of the world which he knows to be contrary to the divine will? If so he may go to confession and Communion, he

may hear Masses and sermons, he may attend public devotions; he may give alms and pray as much and as often as he likes, but he will never persuade me that he has a sincere pleasure in God, or that he loves God with his whole heart.

And what sort of a love can such people have when they say, not, indeed, in words, but by their acts, no matter how long they spend reading their prayer-books, or how high an opinion they have of their own piety, when they say: My God, I love thee above all things, but (and this is a thought that must often occur to them) not above this or that thing, which I do not wish to give up? Lord, may thy holy will be done, but not in this matter. Oh, my God, I am ready to do all that thou wishest, except that one thing; in that I have to conform to the custom of the world, and to prefer it to thee. I am willing to sacrifice everything—my life, my property, my blood, if thy holy faith or thy honor and glory should require it, but thou must not ask me to overcome myself in this or that matter. Is that the way to love God with the whole heart and above all things? You may say to me a hundred times, and a thousand times, that it is; but I will not believe you, and I maintain that all your piety is mere nonsense; God does not please you; you do not love him at all, not to speak of loving him with your whole heart. For "he that feareth God, neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. 7 : 19), be it great or small.

Consider the example of the Saints; you may learn from it what it is to love God with one's whole heart. Ask St. Bernard, and he will tell you that "a soul that loves God looks upon it as more feaful and terrible than hell itself to offend him in the least thing." He does not speak of offending God in great, but in small things. Nor does he say that a soul that loves God would find such offences terrible, but more terrible than hell. Consider patriarch Abraham; he was so ready to obey the least sign of God's will that he actually drew his sword to sacrifice to God his only son Isaac, whom he loved most tenderly. And

we, Christians, who say so often in our prayers that we love God with all our hearts, we refuse to sacrifice to him not our only child, but some miserable thing that he asks of us! Is it not evident that we do not really love our God, and therefore that he does not really love us from his heart?

But, alas! what an effect on the soul and mind of a Christian who wishes to save his soul and to go to heaven must this thought have: I have no true pleasure in God, and he has no true pleasure in me! On the contrary, the thought, I now give to my God all that I have, and my God has a true pleasure and joy in me, is the thought that takes all the bitterness and pain out of the torments of the martyrs, out of the labors and afflictions of apostolic men, and fills their hearts with the sweetest heavenly consolation.

But for you, tepid and slothful Christians, who refuse to give to God all that he asks of you, what a painful and troublesome thing it is for you to have to think, in the midst of your business, your household cares, and your sensual enjoyments, nay, even in the midst of those apparent good works of yours, that you do not do all that God wishes, that God is not satisfied with you, that he has no pleasure in you! In that state you go to the church to pray; but the worm is gnawing secretly at your conscience: God is not pleased with me. You confess your sins, but your conscience cries out: God is not pleased with me, because I do not amend all that I should amend. You go to the table of the Lord to receive the Flesh and Blood of your Saviour; but your conscience cries out: God is not pleased with me, there is still something in my actions or in my dress, as I approach the communion-rail, which is dislpeasing to God because it gives the others an occasion of offending him by looks or desires. After Communion you repeat the usual prayers to the God whom you have within you; I love thee with my whole heart; I am sorry for ever having offended thee by the least sin; I would rather die than displease thee in the least; I offer

myself, body and soul, to thy service; do with me, oh, God, whatever thou wilt! What fine words these are, which are found in every prayer-book; but they are accompanied by the gnawing worm: I know that what I say is not true; I do not love God with my whole heart; there is still a sin, an imperfection that I am not sorry for, a scandalous custom that I do not wish to give up; I will not give everything to God; in this or that thing I will not do what is pleasing to God. Therefore you have great reason to fear that God, to whom you are unwilling to give yourself and all that you have completely, may also, when temptation assails you, deny you those special helps of his grace, which he is bound to give to no one, and in your last moments he may deny you the grace of final perseverance, which he is equally at liberty to give or to refuse. Can any Christian who wishes to go to heaven be at ease with such a thought as that in his mind?

Ah, Christians, let us act honestly with the God of infinite goodness; let us serve him with all possible zeal, and fulfil his will as far as we know how; let us be true to him in small things as well as in great; let us not give even the smallest portion of our hearts to the devil, the world, or the flesh, but keep them altogether for him to whom alone they belong of right, and who wishes that we should offer them completely to himself! If we do so, he will address us at the hour of death in these joyful words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matth. 25 : 23). Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE DISGRACE OF THE SEASON OF SHROVETIDE.

"*Why stand you hear all the day idle?*"—Matth. 20 : 6.

If there are any days in the year on which most men lead an idle, or rather an unchristian and sinful life, it is on these days of Shrovetide. For there are now many Christians who might be asked, with holy anger, the question: "Why stand you here all the day idle?" Why do you spend the day and night in such a licentious and unchristian manner? What season are we in now? In the season of Shrovetide—that is to say, the time that immediately precedes the Lenten fast; a time that, according to the vicious custom of the world, is supposed to begin almost on Christmas day, as far as revelry and dissipation are concerned. It is Shrovetide, then. Many imagine that the Christian law is abrogated for the time being, so that dissipation, wantonness, and all kinds of vices may be indulged in freely. If a sin is committed during this season, people say that it does not matter; it is Shrovetide now; we must enjoy ourselves. To show how false, erroneous, and unchristian this view is, is my object to-day, and I say:

I. The days of Shrovetide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days.

II. The days of Shrovetide should by right be kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them.

I. The Catholic Church, from the very beginning, never showed greater zeal than in the utter extirpation of all the rem-

nants and abuses of heathenism. When a city or country was converted to Christianity, the first question was: What are those idolatrous temples doing here? Away with them! But what harm is in them? They are mere buildings, which have cost a great deal of money. Would it not be better to allow them to remain, and, after having destroyed the images of the false gods, to devote them to the worship of the one true God? No; they are relics of heathenism and must not be tolerated; they must be burnt to ashes, so that not a vestige of them remains. That was what the early Christians did in the reign of the great emperor Constantine: "Constantine destroyed everywhere the most beautiful temples of the gods;" and St. Augustine testifies that throughout the whole of Africa the images of the gods were broken in pieces, and trampled under foot, and the very stones of their temples were held in such abomination that no one would use them for building purposes.

Now, if the Christian religion shows such zeal in extirpating and abolishing the dead relics of heathenism, is it likely that it will tolerate its living abuses and scandals—I mean the dissipations of Shrovetide? No; the Catholic Church condemned all kinds of plays, dances and other abuses when she abolished idolatry. Certainly there were Christians in former times, and perhaps there are many nowadays, too, who imitate the blind heathens in those abuses; but the holy fathers always reproved their conduct with the greatest zeal. St. Ambrose, seeing those customs carried on in Milan, ascended the pulpit in his episcopal vestments, and began to complain most bitterly as follows: "I have a great complaint to make of many of you—namely, that you keep the festivals of the heathens." What a crime that is! Are we Christians? If we are the living temples of God, why do we keep the feasts of false gods in the temple of the true God? Souls consecrated to God, where is your faith? Do those heathenish customs suit the religion you profess? St. Augustine also writes against the dissipations of

Shrovetide. When the plague has left the town, he says, the inhabitants burn all their clothing, no matter how costly it is, so as to destroy every germ of the pestilence. In the same way the Church of God acts; she cries down the poisonous remnants of heathenism, and warns her children against them. Water! water! she cries out; bring some water to throw on the smoldering ashes of this hellish fire!

The days of this season belong to God, as well as the other days of the year, and must be kept sacred to him alone. It is never lawful to do evil. The vain children of the world say: Shrovetide comes only once a year, and we must have a little pleasure—as if they could not enjoy themselves without indulging in sinful, impure, forbidden, unchristian and heathenish pleasures! No, there is no day in the year on which such things are lawful. I read in the Holy Scriptures that there is a time for every human occupation: "All things have their season," and in their times all things pass under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Eccles. 3 : 1, 2, 4, 7). And he goes on to give a list of twenty-eight different times; but the words, "a time to sin," a time to behave in an unchristian manner, a time to imitate heathenish abuses, I cannot find any mention of. When there is question of keeping the commandments of God, all the times in the year are alike; Shrovetide or not, black remains black, and sin is always sin and offensive to God. What would you think, married men, if one of you were to find out that his wife had been unfaithful to him, and if she said in excuse of her crime: oh, it is Shrovetide; it does not matter; I was only amusing myself; it will be all right again when Lent begins? What! the justly enraged husband would say, you faithless wretch, did you not promise to be true to me till death? How can you excuse yourself by saying that it is Shrovetide? And why should I

tolerate now what can never be lawful? Let a thief try to excuse himself to the judge: I have robbed and stolen, it is true; but it is now Shrovetide, and we can venture to infringe the law a little. Shrovetide, indeed, the judge would say; to prison with you, and keep Shrovetide there! Now, if men do not allow any difference to be made between this and other seasons of the year as far as unlawful things are concerned, how could the God of infinite justice and sanctity tolerate such a difference? "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "yesterday and to-day and the same forever." What he was yesterday, he is to-day; what he forbade yesterday under pain of hell, he forbids to-day under the same penalty, and will forbid it at all times.

II. A truly affectionate friend has no better opportunity of showing his love and fidelity than when his friend is in difficulties and wants consolation. "If thou wouldst get a friend, try him before thou takest him; for there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble" (Eccles. 6 : 7, 8). For there are friends who remain faithful for a time, that is, as long as things go well with their friend; but when the day of trial and calamity comes they turn the cold shoulder to him. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Amongst the dying injunctions that David gave to his son Solomon there was the following: "Show kindness to the sons of Berzellai the Galaadite, and let them eat at thy table" (3 Kings 2 : 7); this is the last request I, thy father, make of thee, my son. Why? "For they met me," he says, "when I fled from the face of Absalom, thy brother." When my greatest friends abandoned me, they came to my assistance; when the greater part of my subjects revolted against me, they remained faithful and proved their fidelity to me in the time of need; therefore I now commend them to your favor and protection; let them eat at your table like your own children. So highly is true friendship and affection prized in time of difficulty and trial; while the friend-

ship of words alone, that is shown merely in prosperity, is thought nothing of.

If what St. Paul writes to the Hebrews is true: "Crucifying to themselves again the Son of God, and making him a mockery," I say, if it is true that they who commit a mortal sin crucify anew their Saviour Jesus Christ, and make him a mockery as far as they can, then it is quite certain that of all the seasons in the year the present is that in which Jesus Christ suffers most, and he would really feel it if, in his glory, he were capable of suffering—and that, too, from his own children, from those who are co-heirs to heaven with him. Are there not, in fact, many Christians who carefully avoid mortal sin during the rest of the year, but at this season, under the pretext of enjoying themselves, abandon the path of virtue, and offend the good God, who is worthy of all love, by the most shameful transgressions? Is not Christ again given over to the gentiles, since heathen practices are again indulged in? Is he not mocked in nightly assemblies, in dancing-houses and in impure plays? Is he not blindfolded by indecent masquerading, in which men appear disguised as women, and women as men? Is not our Lord scourged and crowned with thorns by deliberate drunkenness, by uncharitable and impure talk, and by indecent liberties? And finally, is he not nailed again to the Cross by the many sins which arise from dangerous company and nightly carousing? "And you, too, Brutus," said the dying Julius Cæsar, when he saw his dear friend Brutus amongst his assassins. Are you also one of my murderers? Must I, then, die by your hand? In the same way might Christ address you if he saw you taking part in the dissipations of this season. And you, my dear child, are you, too, among those who crucify me again?

You have doubtless heard the story of Jonas, the jester of the Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II. Jonas was always expected to make his appearance at the Emperor's table; but dur-

ing Shrovetide he was not to be seen. They sought for him for a long time, and at last found him in the church of St. Stephen at Vienna. Being brought before the Emperor and asked why he absented himself in such an unusual manner, he answered: During the whole year the Almighty God is busy giving audiences to great lords and to the common people, and we poor jesters can hardly have a chance of appearing before him; but in these days, when others make fools of themselves, we can afford to be wise and to do homage to God, who is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, and who is now abandoned by the greater number of his friends. Truly, that was not a foolish answer, and the example of this jester might well be followed by all Christians who deserve the name; and since the majority of people lay their reason aside and abandon their God during this season, those who wish to remain faithful to him should redouble their zeal in his service. There is not much in being pious when every one is so; but to be pious and faithful to God in the midst of the wicked, as Tobias was in Ninive, Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in the court of Pharao, and Abraham among the Chaldeans, that is a certain sign of a real, sincere love of God.

Cry out with Mathathias: "Although all nations obey king Antiochus, so as to depart every man from the service of the law of his fathers, and consent to his commandments, I and my sons and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers. God be merciful unto us; it is not profitable for us to forsake the law and the justices of God. We will not hearken to the words of king Antiochus, neither will we sacrifice, and transgress the commandments of our law, to go another way" (1 Mach. 2 : 19-22). Let us resolve to serve faithfully God, who, even during Shrovetide, deserves to be constantly loved and praised by men above all things. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GLUTTONY.

"*In hunger and thirst, in fastings often.*"—2 Cor. 11 : 27.

If fasting and hunger are so general amongst holy Christians, who thereby subdue the flesh and keep it in servitude, as we see from to-day's Epistle to have been the case with St. Paul, who says of himself that he performed his apostolic office in hunger and thirst, in fastings often; if fasting and frequent mortification of the desire of eating and drinking is a salutary, nay, necessary means for most men to tame the insolence of the flesh, and to overcome many temptations, if fasting and abstinence from flesh meat is commanded by the Church for the same purpose, at different times of the year, and under pain of grievous sin, what will those Christians have to answer for who are given to gluttony? A vice that is common enough, especially amongst idle people, who spend their time uselessly; for this vice is one of the consequences of idleness. By idleness we are inflamed with lust, puffed up with pride, inclined to vanity in dress, made slothful in rising in the morning, and strongly tempted to gluttony. I will speak of this vice by answering these questions:

I. In what does the vice of gluttony consist?

II. How can one know that he is addicted to this vice?

I. The vice of gluttony does not consist merely in eating and drinking, for we must eat and drink in order to preserve life, since the natural heat of the human body always causes some consumption of vital energy, and the loss must be supplied by

food taken at proper times. To that end food and drink have been given to us by the Almighty God in the greatest abundance and variety.

Gluttony does not consist in the quality, excellence, or costliness of the food or drink, provided it is not of a forbidden kind otherwise; for a poor laborer who has nothing but a plate of vegetables and a piece of bread can commit gluttony; while, on the other hand, a rich man, who has the most costly and the best prepared viands on his table, may not exceed the bounds of temperance.

Gluttony does not always consist in eating and drinking a great deal. For one man requires more than another to keep up his strength; so that of two men who are sitting at the same table, one who eats and drinks a great deal may observe the virtue of moderation, while he who eats less may sin by gluttony.

The sin of gluttony consists, then, in nothing else but an inordinate manner of eating and drinking—when the action, namely, is not directed to the end for which God created food and drink. From this it follows that I must not eat or drink oftener or more than I believe to be necessary for that end, that is, to the support of the health and strength necessary to serve God according to my condition; just as medicine, which is used only to recover lost health, or to avert sickness, is never employed but when it is believed necessary for that purpose. Therefore, whenever my intention in eating and drinking cannot be reconciled with that end, or whenever I eat or drink in such a manner as to prevent me from directing my action to that end, I am guilty of gluttony. Thus, I cannot have a good intention when I eat or drink what is forbidden by the law of God or of the Church. That was the sin that our forefather Adam committed in Paradise, when he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, that was given him by Eve; and that sin is the origin and cause of all the evils that the human race has to

suffer. Nor could I have a good intention if I eat or drink what I know by experience, or by the advice of a physician, to be prejudicial to my health; nor when I eat or drink so much that I overload the stomach, or dull the intellect so that I cannot attend to the duties of my state; and so on. Every fault and every sin that is committed in any of these ways comes from an evil source—that is, from the gratification of the sensual appetites. For he who seeks that alone does not care whether the food or drink is wholesome or not, whether it is allowed or forbidden, or whether it is enjoyed with moderation or to excess; as long as it is pleasing to the palate he is satisfied. Therefore, gluttony is an inordinate appetite, or desire of food or drink, for the sake of gratifying the sense of taste.

St. Augustine publicly acknowledges his shortcomings in this respect when he thus complains to God: "Thou hast taught me, oh, Lord, to take food as I would medicine. But how often am I not deceived herein by my own sensuality, so that I exceed the requirements of necessity! Besides the intention of supporting my strength, which alone should animate me in eating and drinking, another, that of gratifying my sensuality, also manages to introduce itself; so that, although I am determined to eat no more than is absolutely necessary, yet sensuality comes in uninvited, and claims its share also. Further, when I believe that I have barely satisfied the wants of nature, I find on examination that the sensual appetite has committed a theft on me; so that sometimes I do not know what intention I have, nor why I eat and drink, whether it is for my health's sake, or solely for pleasure, or for both together."

The same saint writes of his holy mother, Monica, who was brought up as a child in the greatest austerity, so that, no matter how thirsty she was, she would not take a drop of water out of the usual times; and yet, when occasion offered, she allowed herself to be conquered by a fondness for wine. Whenever her parents sent her for wine she used at first to taste just a few

drops, but as time went on she grew so accustomed to it that she could drink it by the glassful. However, her parents found her out, and, having given her a sharp reproof, cured her of the bad habit.

From this I must conclude that if such great Saints were not freed from this vice, although they constantly endeavored to mortify and overcome themselves, and always took the greatest pains to eat and drink with a good intention, and not to exceed the bounds of Christian mortification, so that they took food as if it were medicine, what must we think of worldly-minded people who deliberately seek their bodily comfort, convenience, and pleasure in all things, who are shocked at the very name of Christian mortification and penance, who look upon a fast of forty days, commanded under pain of mortal sin by the Church of God, as an intolerable burden and think it next to an impossibility to keep it to the end? Do not these people sin by gluttony every day almost? "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7 : 16), said Christ of the false prophets. Even so, it may easily be seen whether one is addicted to the vice of gluttony, and whether he seeks his pleasure in eating and drinking, or, to speak more correctly, ways and means of gratifying one's sense of taste.

II. Signs of gluttony are: To eat or drink too early; to be too delicate in eating or drinking; to eat or drink too much; to eat or drink too eagerly; to be too careful about good eating and drinking. These signs show that one does not take food or drink for the proper end, but rather to satisfy the sense of taste, and that, therefore, one is guilty of gluttony.

1. To eat and drink before necessity obliges. Thus Jonathan was sentenced to death by his father because he tasted a little honey before the proper time. This sign is to be seen in those who have no proper time fixed for their meals, and who regard their appetite and their desire as their clock, and not

hunger or necessity. They are always ready to eat, as often as they find anything that suits their taste. Early or late, morning, noon, or evening, between meals, it is all one to them. There are some who, before they have finished dressing in the morning, nay, immediately on awaking, and while still in bed, must have tea, coffee, a pipe of tobacco, or something else ready for them; they eat and drink before they say their morning prayers, nay, before they make the sign of the Cross, or a good intention, or even think of God. An evident sign amongst those who are in good health and have no valid excuse for anticipating the usual time is that they eat and drink not through necessity and for the sake of preserving their strength for the service of God, but merely to satisfy their sense of taste, and that therefore they are guilty of gluttony.

2. To be too delicate in eating is the second sign of gluttony, and it is to be observed in those who, although they do not eat out of meal-times, yet insist on having everything cooked in a particular manner, so as to suit their taste, and if that is not done they have no words harsh enough for the cook; they are never satisfied with common food, no matter how good it is; they must always have the best of everything, no matter what it costs. In this class, however, I do not mean to include the sick, or the delicate, or those of high station who place exquisite viands before their guests, according to the requirements of necessity, Christian charity and courtesy. But, generally speaking, the satisfying one's self with food of that kind can hardly be called anything but gluttony and sensuality.

3. This ordinarily gives rise to the third sign, eating too much. He who measures the quantity of his food by his appetite and taste cannot but exceed the bounds of moderation, and will eat more than necessity requires. There are some to whom one might with truth apply those words of the prophet Isaias: "Most impudent dogs, they never had enough" (Is. 56 : 11). They eat and drink as if they could never satisfy them-

selves; as long as they like the food, and have plenty of it, they continue to gorge themselves, until the overloaded stomach refuses to bear any more. These people are worse than oxen, horses and mules, that never eat more than is necessary to satisfy their hunger. This is, therefore, the most odious and most injurious form of gluttony.

4. The fourth sign of gluttony is a too great eagerness in eating, the sin that Esau committed when he so far forgot himself as to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. Esau lost the glory of his birthright because he gave way to his desire for that vile food, for the sake of which he sold his dignity as first-born; thus showing what an influence gluttony had on him. It is not the costliness of the food, but the too great desire for it which constitutes gluttony. The most remarkable sins of gluttony were caused, not by delicately prepared meats, but by coarse and common food: The first man was tempted not by the well-cooked meats, but by a raw apple; Esau, by a dish of lentils, not by a roast fowl; the devil tempted our Lord by a piece of dry bread, and not by a well-prepared dish. So true is it that it is not the quality of the food, but a too great eagerness for it that constitutes gluttony. They sin, who, while they are eating, are so completely absorbed in what they are doing that their eyes, hands and their whole bodies, as well as their mouths, are fully occupied; they swallow down one mouthful after another, as if they were afraid the table would fly away from them unless they make haste. An evident sign of gluttony, and, indeed, of rudeness, which is not only contrary to Christian temperance, but is also very injurious to health. People should remember this warning: "Use as a frugal man the things that are set before thee; lest, if thou eatest much, thou be hated" (Eccles. 31 : 19); that is to say, eat with prudence, modesty and decency.

5. The fifth sign is to be too careful about good eating and drinking, as is the case with those who are always feasting, as

if they did not eat to live, but live to eat and drink. Of such people St. Paul says: "Whose God is their belly" (Phil. 3 : 19); they are nearly always thinking of eating, drinking and feasting. It was for living in that way that the rich man in the Gospel was condemned to hell; for the Gospel does not say that he was guilty of any other sin but gluttony: "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day" (Luke 16 : 19). What will be still harder to answer for at the judgment-seat is that those who live in that way have hardly anything left wherewith to give alms, although the poor are suffering hunger and thirst. There was a certain French courtier who had built for himself a magnificent house like a palace; when the king saw it he could not sufficiently admire the skill of the architect, the beauty of the furniture, etc. But when he went into the kitchen, and saw that it was very small and that it had only one fireplace, he was amazed, and asked how such a mistake was made, to put a small kitchen like that in so large and fine a house. Your majesty, answered the courtier, it was no mistake; for it was done at my special order; "a small kitchen makes a large house, but a large kitchen makes a small house." It is not hard to understand what he meant by that.

6. Finally, one may be addicted to the vice of gluttony, although one does not eat out of meal-times, nor too delicately, nor too much, nor too greedily, nor too luxuriously. And how is that? A beggar may be avaricious, although he does not own a farthing; a poor girl may be proud, although no one has any regard for her; namely, in heart, and through an inordinate desire of riches and honors. In the same way one may be guilty of gluttony, and many, in fact, are guilty of it who have hardly enough to support life, and yet long for good living and envy those who can sit every day at a well-furnished table, while they think themselves unhappy in being deprived of that pleasure.

Like the Israelites in the desert, who longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and who were tired of the manna that was sent them daily from heaven: "Our soul now loatheth this very light food" (Numb. 21 : 5), so these people long for the means of indulging in the pleasures of the table. And how severely the Israelites were punished for their sin! "Wherefore the Lord sent amongst the people fiery serpents" to bite and kill them, and to teach them, and us also, how hateful to God is the vice of gluttony.

Whenever we enjoy the gifts of God in the shape of food and drink, we must not forget the good intention, nor lose sight of the end for which we should eat and drink, which is to preserve our strength for the service of God; and if we do that we shall at once overcome all gluttony. There are opportunities of mortifying ourselves in that respect, even at a well furnished table; for instance, we might allow one or two morsels of something we are very fond of to remain untasted, and offer them up to God in thought; or we might now and then abstain altogether from the dish we like best, or, what is still better, keep it for Jesus Christ— that is, for the poor—as we read of St. Louis, king of France, whose biographer says of him that he always kept the best food for the poor, while he himself was contented with the worst; or we might leave the table before having fully satisfied our appetite. Mortifications of this kind, when practised with perseverance, and daily, are of more profit than fasting occasionally for whole days together. Let us often recall those words of the Apostle to the Romans: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in this serveth Christ, pleaseth God" (Rom. 14 : 17, 18). Therefore, according to the example of the same Apostle, who says elsewhere, "I know both how to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4 : 12), let us try to practise temperance, that we, too, may be able to say of ourselves with truth, I know how to eat and be hungry; I know how to act

when I have abundance and when I am in want. They who have to be content with coarse and homely food, must be resigned to the will of God and thank him for what he has given them. They who have abundance must learn how to keep themselves within the bounds of Christian temperance. And with regard to this matter, let us all remember the words of Christ: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away;" and so we shall learn to reserve our greatest appetite for the heavenly banquet which will satiate us for all eternity. Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

MANY, DURING SHROVETIDE, PREFER TO FOLLOW THE DEVIL RATHER THAN CHRIST.

"*Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all this shall be accomplished which were written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man.*"—Luke 8 : 31.

How do these two things harmonize, the Gospel of to-day and the present season? The change in the ceremonies of the Church, and the change in the manners of the world during these days? Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, and speaks of nothing but the bitter torments and death that await him, but the perverse world speaks of nothing but the amusements of Shrovetide. A fortnight ago the Catholic Church showed her grief by suspending the recitation of the joyful Te Deum and the Alleluia; but the world now, more than ever, indulges in dissipation and revelry. How do these things harmonize? Does not the Holy Ghost say: "A tale out of time is like music in mourning"? (Ecclus. 22 : 6.) Singing and music on one side,

silence and weeping on the other; there is surely little harmony there. Not without reason does the Catholic Church in her sorrowful silence, and omitting the usual signs of joy, appoint for this day the Gospel that I have read for you; for her object is, partly to show the sorrow that afflicts her motherly heart at seeing so many of her children following the customs of the vain world, nay, the abuses of the godless heathens, and thus taking sides with the devil during these days, and partly to exhort and encourage her faithful children to remain true to their crucified Redeemer during these days by living in a pious and holy manner.

During these days, especially, each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God.

Represent Lucifer to yourselves as sitting on a high throne in a large plain near Babylon, with a terrible countenance and eyes darting fire, and surrounded by smoke and flames and great numbers of devils and human beings, holding in his hands a standard, on which are painted the vain pomps of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the greed of riches and the pride of life. And represent Jesus Christ to yourselves as standing modestly and humbly on the ground, in a large plain near Jerusalem, with a mild and friendly countenance, holding the standard of the Cross and accompanied by his Angels, Apostles and those who work for the salvation of souls. Lucifer is near Babylon, a word which signifies confusion; Jesus Christ is near Jerusalem, the city of peace and rest; thus showing how the wicked, who take sides with the devil, are full of uneasiness and trouble, while the just, who follow the example of Christ, enjoy eternal peace and consolation. Lucifer appears with a terrible, Christ with a friendly countenance, in order to distinguish between the cruel slavery of the devil and the sweet yoke of Christ.

Lucifer sits on a lofty throne as a sign of pride; Jesus stands on the ground as a sign of humility.

Both invite men to follow them. "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden," says Christ in winning accents, "and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light" (Matt. 11 : 28-30). Go, my Apostles and servants, throughout the world; try to win over souls to my side; persuade them to enlist under my standard, to obey my law, and to imitate me; preach to them contempt of the world and of all temporal and perishable things. The daily pay that I will give in this life to those who serve me truly, will be eternal joys with me in the kingdom of heaven. Go, ye devils, cries out Lucifer in a terrible voice, go through the world and compel souls to enter my service, to enroll themselves under my banner; leave them neither rest nor peace by day or night until they yield to you; attack them by your evil suggestions and temptations; make use of wicked men to help you to corrupt and lead the innocent into sin by their bad teaching and example; inspire them with the love of worldly honors, of money and riches and of sensual pleasures; promise them, in my name, if they serve me truly, a comfortable, luxurious, pleasant and happy life. Oh, the madness and folly of most men in allowing themselves to be deceived by the devil and to be led astray by him, for the sake of an imaginary breath of honor, a worthless piece of money, or a brutish passion, so that they crowd after him and are hurried into hell; while only a very small number prefer to enlist under the standard of Jesus Christ, and to take on themselves his sweet yoke.

But at no period is this deplorable folly more evident than during the present season of Shrovetide. At other times we might compare the devil to a dog, tied up with a strong chain, who can bark, but cannot bite any, unless those who, of their

own accord, approach too near him. But in these days it seems as if he had broken his chain, and is running raging through the world, attacking every one, without distinction of age, sex, or condition, so that he drags away from the side of Jesus Christ, and over to his own, by sin, many who were before pious, innocent souls, who loved God with all their hearts. Is it not so? Do not many live during these days as if they knew neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor Christ crucified, nor Gospel law? As if there was full and free permission for them to commit what sins they please? Thousands of souls run, without being asked, to enlist themselves under the standard of the devil; the gain is all on the side of the devil, who betrays souls to destruction. Jesus Christ, exposed on the altar under sacramental veils, cries out to his children: "Come to me, all of you, and I will refresh you;" remain with me, keep the faith you so solemnly swore to me in Baptism, and I will reward you eternally! But in vain; the loss is all on the side of Christ, who gives life. Most people refuse to listen to him during these days; many who have laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the morning, and entered into a fresh compact with their God and Saviour by receiving him in the Holy Communion, banish him again from their hearts during the afternoon with the greatest ingratitude, by going into dangerous company and into the occasion of sin, and thus burden their consciences anew with sins which they will have to repent of again and to confess during Lent.

And what are you now going to do? "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord," I say to you in the words in which the heroic Josue addressed the Israelites just before his death, when he was exhorting them to persevere in the service of the true God, "If it seem evil to serve the Lord, you have your choice; choose this day that which pleaseth you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods which your fathers served in

Mesopotamia, or the gods of the Amorrhites, in whose land you dwell;" you can do as you please, but you must know that, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josue 24 : 15). In the same way, Christians, I say to you, "you have your choice;" take whichever side you please; make up your minds as to whether you will join the rabble who are following the devil, and serve the false gods of the vain worldlings among whom you are living; or whether, with your holy ancestors, who so bravely shed their blood for Jesus Christ, you will remain faithful to the true God. But consider first which of the two has the greater claim on your love and service. You are quite free; make what choice you please.

Christians, can one of you hesitate for a moment as to which side he should join, Christ's or the devil's? Your God, who has given you all that you have, or that wicked spirit from whom you cannot expect anything that is good? Your God, who, through excess of love, gave up his life for you, to save you from eternal death, or the devil, who, if God allowed him, would at once hurry you into hell as a reward for having served him? Your God, who gives himself to you as your food and drink, that you may have eternal life, or the devil, who tries to give you a poison that will cause your eternal death? Your God, in whose service you now enjoy the sweetest repose, the greatest interior consolation and comfort, the cruel demon, in whose slavery your wretched conscience will be unceasingly tortured and afflicted? Your God, who has promised you the eternal joys of heaven as a recompense, or the devil, who is already fanning the flames of hell, that he may torture you therein for serving him faithfully? Think well before you decide!

Vain children of the world, I say with Josue, do as you please; "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," and serve him alone. I am sure that you, too, will make the same determined answer that the Israelites made to Josue: and the people answered and said, God forbid we should leave the Lord,

and serve strange gods. The Lord, our God, he brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; and did very great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the ways by which we journeyed. Therefore we will serve the Lord, for he is our God" (Josue 24 : 16, 18). My dear Christians, I am afraid that the servants of the world and the wicked followers of Satan, in whose company you will perhaps be during these dangerous days, may lead some of you astray by their seductive and bad example, so that you will become like themselves and abandon the way of the children of God. Will you do so? No, cried out the people of Israel unanimously to Josue; "No, it shall not be as thou sayest, but we will serve the Lord." So, too, must you think and say. No, what you are afraid of will never come to pass; we will serve the Lord our God, and remain faithful to the standard of Jesus Christ.

During the rest of the year every good Catholic at least knows that the first and chief command must be exactly observed: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart," and with all thy strength and above all things; that the exhortation of St. Peter must be observed: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye strong in faith" (1 Pet. 5 : 8, 9); that the exhortation of St. John must be exactly fulfilled: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world" (1 John 2 : 15), much less the abuses introduced by the world; that the law of Christ must be obeyed to the letter: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee" (Matt. 5 : 6); if it is an occasion of sin to thee, away with it at once; for it is expedient for thee to go into heaven with one eye, rather than to go to hell with two eyes. Then good Catholics can keep their feast-days by a true service of God. Oh, let me say it again, what a joyful sight that is for God and his Angels!

But it is Shrovetide, say the vain children of the world and the partisans of the devil. And what then? Oh, one must enjoy one's self! And so you can enjoy yourselves, but in a manner befitting Christians and children of God; that is, you can rejoice in the Lord, as St. Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men" (Philip 4 : 5, 6). But is it rejoicing in the Lord and acting as becomes the children of God to go into places and company in which Christian modesty and humility, as well as the purity of the heart, if not of the body, are exposed to certain danger? And here I allude not only to those nightly meetings in dance-houses, but also to all assemblages in which persons of both sexes spend the night amusing themselves. Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God to mask and disguise one's self in such a way as to provoke the Almighty to disgust? Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God to rob one's self deliberately of reason by excessive drinking, and, as is the custom in these days, to indulge in all sorts of immodest buffooneries and liberties?

Therefore, it still remains true that if you wish to act as true Christians and children of God, you will have nothing to do with such pleasures. You may enjoy yourself, but "in the Lord." Others may act as they please; you must remain true to your God. The whole world may side with the devil; you must never desert the standard of Jesus Christ, even during Shrovetide. The soldier is always bound to perform his military duties; there is no Shrovetide in which it is lawful for him to desert his post, or to rebel against his officer; if he is caught in the act of committing any such transgressions even during Shrovetide he is punished at once. The civil and criminal laws are always binding on subjects, and no Shrovetide can excuse from punishment those who are guilty of robbery, murder, coining false money, and rebelling against their lawful sovereign. And therefore no thief dares to steal openly; if he were

to do so, the fact of its being Shrovetide would not excuse him from being brought before the judge. The law of holy matrimony is always to be strictly observed, and no husband or wife is allowed during Shrovetide to be guilty of conjugal infidelity. Now the Christian law is a military law; you are a soldier who in holy Baptism has publicly sworn fidelity to the standard of Jesus Christ, and thus you have renounced forever the devil, the world and the flesh. The Christian law is a just one; you are a subject and owe homage to God as your only sovereign Lord, and to him you have promised obedience. The Christian law is one of spiritual matrimony; your soul is the bride, God the Holy Ghost is the bridegroom, and to him you have promised perpetual love and fidelity. Did you perhaps, as a soldier, when promising to be true to the standard of Christ, make an exception in favor of Shrovetide, as a time during which you could with impunity rebel against him? When you were espoused to the Holy Ghost by sanctifying grace, did you look on Shrovetide as a time during which you might commit spiritual adultery with the devil? No; every agreement you made is for all time; all these laws are binding on you forever.

Far be it from you to desert the Lord, even during these days of Shrovetide, and to serve strange gods. If you see people running off in crowds to join the side of the devil, think of the exhortation that Jeremias gave the Jews, when he forewarned them that they should dwell among the Babylonians, and should see people adoring gods of gold, silver, and stone: "Beware, therefore, that you imitate not the doings of others. But when you see the multitude behind and before adoring them, say you in your hearts: Thou oughtest to be adored, oh, Lord" (Bar. 6 : 4, 5). Remember the fidelity you owe the standard of Jesus Christ, and act as Catulus the Roman general did in former times. Catulus was once engaged in a battle when the tide of success seemed turned against him, and he was on the point of being deserted by his soldiers, when he suddenly seized

the standard, held it up on high, and cried out in a loud voice: "See what you are fighting under;" remember the oath you have sworn under this standard. These few words reanimated the drooping courage of his soldiers, so that they returned boldly to the attack, and fought with the greatest bravery, until they put the enemy to flight. If during these days you find it hard to pray while others are dancing and amusing themselves, hard to appear at the Table of the Lord while others are indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, hard to remain in solitude at home while others are enjoying themselves with heathenish pleasures; or if you perhaps go into company which is dangerous to Christian modesty and purity, at once take courage and ask yourself, under whom am I fighting? and answer: "I have sworn an oath of fidelity to Christ; how, then, can I desert to the army of the devil?" Amen.

First Sunday of Lent.

How the fasts of the Church, which are violated by gluttony, are to be observed.

"*When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.*"—Matth. 4 : 2.

To do penance, to deny one's self, and to mortify the flesh is most necessary; necessary, because we are sinners who have inherited the sin of our forefather Adam, and who are banished to this vale of tears, that we may regain the heaven we have lost by doing penance and following the rugged way of the Cross; necessary, because we are sinners who, after having received Baptism, have offended God by sin, and must atone for our sin by penance; necessary, even if we are innocent, because it is still

possible for us to sin, so that we must strive by penance to keep ourselves in the state of grace; necessary, because we are living under a head who was crowned with thorns, and we must be like him, if we hope to be with him in heaven. The Gospel of to-day reminds us of a special manner of doing penance, of which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives us an example: "When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry." The example of Jesus Christ is there to encourage all Christians to fast, abstain and endure hunger; and it is to that that the Catholic Church binds her children during this season under pain of sin, that they may imitate Christ to a certain extent. Are we, then, bound to fast? Certainly. And how?

We are all bound to fast in the manner prescribed by the law, a duty which is neglected by many Christians.

Are we bound to fast, and how are we to fast? That is the very thing that our opponents are most determined on denying; they do not refuse to acknowledge that our Lord fasted forty days, but they maintain that it is impossible, or at least useless, or even superstitious to imitate him according to our ability in that respect. That it is which liberal Catholics, who are unfortunately numerous enough, cannot get into their heads, because it does not suit their stomachs. Why should we fast? they say. Why should we not eat and drink what is set before us, as long as we have a good appetite for it? God has given his gifts to men that they may use them at pleasure. Does he not say: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man"? (Matt. 15 : 11.) But they interpret that text falsely, and in an arbitrary manner.

1. There is the natural law. Are you a human being? Then if you are, you are often bound to fast. And why? I will tell you. The fire in your stove is burning so brightly that the flame is going up the chimney; if you let it go on like that it

wil set fire to the house. What will you do in order to avert that danger? You do not think long about it; you at once take away the wood which feeds the flame. You have a horse in your stable which you require now and then to go to another town on business; but you feed him very well, and leave him a long time idle, so that he has become quite stubborn, and rears, and plunges if any one attempts to mount him. What is to be done? There is not much difficulty in the matter. Shut up your corn-bin; do not give him so much to eat; let him suffer hunger for a few days, and then give him nothing but a little hay and some green stuff, and he will soon become tame enough. Your body is your horse, which must carry the soul about; your intention is to use it to reach heaven; but when it is too well fed it becomes restive, like an untamed horse, and God himself warns us not to allow that to happen: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding" (Ps. 31 : 9). It revolts against the spirit and refuses to obey reason in many things; so that there is nothing left but to take away its food, to be more moderate in eating and drinking, and to subdue it by fasting and abstinence; otherwise it will leave the road which leads to heaven, and enter on the broad path which leads to hell. The concupiscence of the flesh is like a blazing fire, which threatens to consume the beautiful and precious soul with its impure flame. How is that mischief to be prevented? Take away the fuel, the nourishment of that flame; the body must learn to fast, it must be subdued by hunger and thirst, or else it will bring the soul to eternal flames.

2. Are you a Christian? Do you adore the true God? If so, then you must often fast, because the divine law makes fasting obligatory. The first commandment that God gave to man was that of fasting and abstinence; for immediately after having created Adam, he told him that he was not to eat the fruit of a certain tree under pain of death. The law of fasting is as old as the world. If Adam had observed that law of abstinence,

we, his unhappy descendants, would not now have to fast, and would be free also from many crosses and trials; but because he has harkened to his appetite more than to the voice of God, we must do penance to this day for his gluttony! Now, if God obliged Adam to abstain while he was still innocent, how much greater must not our obligation be, since we have so often offended God? If fasting was prescribed as a medicine to keep Adam in good health, how much more necessary is it not for us?

In the New Testament Jesus Christ goes before us by his example; he tells his followers what they must do after his death: "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast" (Matt. 9 : 15). In the time of the Apostles the rule was to live "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often" (2 Cor. 11 : 27). It is a law which Jesus Christ has given and imposed on his followers.

3. Are you a Catholic? At least you profess to be one, and so you are bound to fast. There is no doubt of the law of the Church in this respect; it is promulgated throughout the whole world, and is constantly observed; it has always been a mark and sign of the true religion and of the true faith in Jesus Christ, and fasting is still a means of distinguishing in our days a Catholic from a Protestant or an atheist. Hence he who, without a dispensation justly obtained, does not observe the fast, is not only disobedient to the Church, but he also denies her in a certain sense; for if I see a man who is in good health eating meat on forbidden days, I look upon him at once, if he is unknown to me, as a Protestant or an infidel.

But do we all fast in the manner prescribed by that law? Every Catholic knows how the fast is to be observed—namely (with the exception of those who are excused), all Catholics of every class and condition are bound under pain of grievous sin, first, to abstain from flesh meat on certain days, and then to eat a full meal only once a day, besides a small collation in the evening.

How many abuses and acts of disobedience are caused by this imaginary difficulty, even amongst Catholics who seem to be fervent enough in other respects! All kinds of pretexts and excuses are framed to obtain a dispensation privately from the ecclesiastical authorities, if the Church has not granted a general and public one. Health is endangered by fasting. The stomach cannot bear fish. The constitution is so delicate that it cannot keep such a long fast. The head suffers from it. The night's rest is disturbed by unpleasant dreams. Fasting makes one so weak that it is impossible to attend to one's duties. These pretexts are suggested by gluttony and sensuality, and yet they must suffice to obtain an exemption from the general law of the Church! Of what value they are in the sight of God will appear before the whole world on the last day.

Delicate constitution, weakness, headache, interrupted sleep, who thinks of them when there is question of spending whole nights in gambling, dancing and other amusements? We do not want to rest from those things, nor do we complain of not being strong enough for them, although it may sometimes take us days to recover after them. But when it becomes necessary to do anything for God, to atone for one's sins, to mortify and chastise the flesh, and to fast and abstain according to the custom observed in the Church for so many centuries—oh, then the weakness appears at once, and the strength vanishes! If one were to say to those delicate people who try to avoid the fast without sufficient cause: See, I will give you two dollars for every day that you abstain from meat, on condition that you give one dollar to the poor when you do not abstain, is it likely that there would be many cases of weakness then? I think not. On the contrary, there would be a great deal of competition in a fast of that kind. And yet it is not a vile piece of money that is promised as a reward for fasting, but the kingdom of heaven, that God himself will give. Oh, but that is another matter altogether; we are too weak to earn heaven by fasting! How-

ever that may be, it would be well to remember the warning of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs: "If thou say: I have not strength enough;" I am too weak, even if you persuade your doctor or your confessor to agree with you, "he that seeth into your heart, he understandeth, and nothing deceiveth the keeper of thy soul;" God will know well enough the value of your excuses, "and he shall render to a man according to his works."

Others again say: My stomach cannot bear fish; my health does not permit me to fast, I should surely become ill. What a pity that would be! But what becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those who often drink to excess, either because they have got into the habit of it, or because they do so through sheer conviviality, although they know that it injures their health, and, as experience tells them, even shortens their lives? Oh, they do not trouble much about their health in such a case as that; they must keep up their old habits! But when there is question of practising temperance, of abstaining from unnecessary food and drink, and of fasting according to the Christian law, then they begin to fear for their health; then is the time to look out for a dispensation. What becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those women who gratify their sensuality whenever they get a chance on the occasion of a visit, and spend their time in drinking tea, coffee or chocolate, although the doctor has forbidden them to do so? What becomes of it with those who do not hesitate to conform to the most scandalous fashions, even in the depth of winter, and thus to open the way to diseases and complaints of different kinds? These are almost the only ones who have to look after their health, and who cannot bear to eat fish, when Lent comes on. And what are we to say of those business men who risk all kinds of dangers by sea and land for the sake of a temporal gain? They think nothing of their lives, even, not to speak of their health. But to abstain from meat on some days,

and to eat fish—oh, that is altogether too dangerous for the health!

It is not right for you to say that fasting injures your health; you should say, rather, that is it disagreeable to your comfort and sensuality. How many there are who cannot get rid of the complaints and diseases from which they suffer, but by temperance, abstinence and fasting? Besides, as God has promised a long life to those who honor their parents and are obedient to them, how could the same God allow our health to be injured and our lives to be shortened by our obedience to our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, when we submit to her law of fasting without seeking to be excused from it, and thereby prove ourselves her obedient, dutiful and zealous children?

In the first chapter of the Book of Daniel you will find the history of those young men who were chosen to wait upon king Nabuchodonosor, and who had first to be fed for some years on food from the king's own table. Four of them, amongst whom was Daniel, begged to be excused from taking that food, as it was unlawful for them to touch it, according to the Jewish law. "And the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel: I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed you meat and drink; and if he should see your faces leaner than those of the other youths, your equals, you shall endanger my head to the king" (Dan. 1 : 10). Do not be afraid, said Daniel; try it only for ten days, and give us during that time nothing but vegetables and water, and you will see whether we shall be thinner (Dan. 1 : 12). "And after ten days their faces appeared fairer and fatter than all the children that ate of the king's meat" (Dan. 1 : 15). And they continued that mode of life for three years longer.

Delicate Christians, you are afraid that Lent will injure your health and strength, although it does not condemn you to live on vegetables and water, and merely requires you to abstain, according to our Christian law, from flesh-meat on two days of the week. Do not fear, I say to you; you can hold out for the

forty days. Leave the care of your health to God. Think of death, which you perhaps imagine you can keep off longer by eating meat; remember that the body which you now pamper will one day be the food of worms; think while you are enjoying an abundance of food and drink, that you may perhaps be the rich man in the flames of hell, and that, like him, you may ask for a drop of water and not be able to get it.

The Church, like an indulgent mother, has been forced to mitigate the ancient severity of the law of fasting, on account of the decrease of fervor and charity on the part of her children. She concedes now as much to our weakness as if she tried to adapt herself to our sensuality. And yet we make such a difficulty of it, we seek to avoid it in every possible way; easy as the law is, we refuse to obey God and the Church of Christ, or at least we do not obey fully, as we ought. Now, we have in addition, a dispensation, according to which it is allowed to eat meat once a day; is there any one, then, who will refuse to observe a strict abstinence on those days on which meat is forbidden, and to observe every day the law regarding the collation? What are we thinking of? Does our religion teach us to adore a crucified God, or does it not? Ah! let us show that we have at least some of this religion left. Amen.

Second Sunday of Lent.

THE END AND OBJECT OF FASTING FRUSTRATED BY GLUTTONY.

"*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.*"—Matth. 17 : 5.

"Hear ye him;" follow his example. What does Christ teach us during this season of Lent? He fasted forty days and

forty nights, and suffered hunger; hear ye him; we are Christians and children of God, and we hope to have a part with him in eternal glory, therefore we must hear him and follow his example. Mortification, fasting, abstinence, hunger, that is what we must learn from him.

We are all bound to fast in the way prescribed by the laws of the Church.

1. The first and principal end for which the Catholic Church has instituted the forty days' fast is to mortify the flesh and do penance, partly as a solemn remembrance of the bitter Passion and death of Jesus Christ, and partly as an atonement for our sins, for which he had to suffer and die. Go to the widow clothed in mourning, who is lamenting the loss of her husband on the aniversary of his death, because she loved him as her own heart, and ask her to take part in a banquet, or to appear in company and enjoy herself; the mere invitation to do so in her present circumstances is a fresh pang for her heart, and renews her grief. No, this is no time for her to make merry; she must be left in peace with her sorrow; entertainments, dancing, laughing, feasting, are out of place for her now; the bare thought of them is insupportable to her; tears and sighs are her only consolation. In the same way, let the vain world, according to its wont, speak to the Church of God, or to a pious and obedient child of the Church, during the holy season of Lent, when she is celebrating the aniversary of the death of her Spouse, Jesus Christ, on the cross; let it speak to her, I say, of forbidden meats, of sumptuous repasts, of gluttony and drunkenness, of amusements and pastimes, of creature comforts and luxuries; oh, all these things are now out of place! they are not at all suited to this time of mourning.

With regard to the atonement for past sins, you remember the fable of the fox, who with great difficulty crept through a narrow hole into a hen-coop. Ha! he thought, this is the place

for me; I shall not easily find such a good opportunity again; and he began without loss of time to devour one fowl after another, until he could eat no more. He then thought it was time to go home, but when he tried to get out at the hole he found that he had grown too fat, and could not manage it; so he began to cry and moan, and shout for help. Another fox happening to pass by, and hearing the noise inside, asked what was the matter. Ah, said the other, I am a prisoner here; I have eaten so much that I cannot get out, and if the owner of the fowls catches me here he will surely kill me; try to help me out. There is no use in my trying, was the answer; there is nothing else for it but to remain where you are, and fast until you are as thin as you were before, and then you will have no difficulty in getting out. Christians, many of us have grown fat during the year on forbidden meat—that is, we have committed different sins against the commandments of God. Some are still held captive by the devil in bonds of sin, and are in danger of eternal death. If the Master were to come and call them away while they were in that state, what would become of their souls? What is to be done? We must mortify ourselves and do penance so as to free ourselves from the captivity in which the devil holds us, and to satisfy the divine justice. This is the time that the Catholic Church has appointed for that purpose; now it is that she commands us to bewail our sins with a supernatural sorrow, and to subdue the flesh by fasting and abstinence, that we may appease the anger of God, and make satisfaction for our sins.

Where are you now, you faint-hearted cowards, with your vain excuses? I cannot fast; I must eat meat, or if I manage to overcome myself sufficiently to abstain from it, I cannot go to bed hungry; I must have something to eat, or else I shall grow weak; I feel that my strength is leaving me, and I shall become quite sad and melancholy; I suffer from stomach-ache during the day and I cannot sleep well at night; in a word, I find fasting

altogether too difficult. Well, then, granted that what you say is true, is not that the reason why fasting was instituted? It must be difficult; it must be disagreeable to the stomach; it must moderate superfluous sleep; it must disturb and interfere with vain pleasures and comforts; it must weary the body and lessen the strength of the unruly flesh; that is the reason why you have to fast. If you had no difficulty in fasting, if it left you just as comfortable as before, how could it chastise and mortify you? What good would it be as a penance? What satisfaction could it make for sin? You say that you cannot eat fish; well, do not eat it, then. Nobody compels you to do so; there are other things that you can eat. But, you say, it is not easy for you to be satisfied with them. I quite agree with you; but that is the proper way for you to fast; the reason why abstinence is commanded is that the body may feel some inconvenience. If you were commanded to eat nothing for the forty days but dry bread, and to drink nothing but water, as many poor people must do their whole lives long, who would be glad indeed if they were always sure of having enough even of such food, would that be too much to do for a God who for your sake died an ignominious death on the cross? Would it be too much to do in order to escape the eternal fire of hell? You are willing to do penance, but on condition that it does not hurt you; you are ready to fast, but in such a way that will cause you no discomfort. Is that fasting for the proper end and object, to subdue the flesh, to do penance and to imitate the sufferings of our Lord?

Christians, Lent is a season of repentance and sorrowful remembrance of the bitter Passion and death of Christ. Whenever gluttony tempts you to forbidden meats, or sensuality to dainties, or greediness to eat too much, or worldliness to pleasure, say those beautiful words to yourselves: My Lord Jesus Christ was crucified; how, then, can I give way to my sensual desires? The sin that Adam committed by eating the forbid-

den fruit cost my Saviour his life; can I, then, have the heart to eat of what the Church has forbidden during this season? My Saviour fasted from all food for forty days; can I not at least abstain, as a good Catholic should, from flesh meat, when I am not in want of it, although I am permitted to use it? My God died for me; how can I indulge my sensuality during the time fixed for the solemn recollection of his death? My God died to atone for my sins, which he could never have committed; ought I not, at least, to atone for my own sins by a little fasting and abstinence? The Church mourns and does penance during this time; shall not I, who boast of being her child, sympathize with her sorrow? Jesus Christ allowed his innocent flesh to be torn with scourges, in order to tame the rebellious tendencies of mine; and shall I now pamper this flesh with all kinds of delicacies?

2. The second object of fasting consists in destroying the vices that we should otherwise be subject to, in raising up our minds to heavenly things, and in acquiring and increasing virtue and heavenly glory. The Church in this way acts like a physician who cures a disease by a remedy that is altogether opposed to it; thus heat is cured by cooling medicines, and cold by those that are apt to stimulate the natural heat. Now there is nothing which so much inclines one to vice, especially to the vice of impurity, as excess in eating and drinking. Diogenes once met a young man about midday, who was dressed up very carefully and was apparently going out of town; Diogenes asked him where he was going. To a banquet, answered the other. Oh, said Diogenes, go, but you will be worse when you come back. The mere light of reason taught this heathen that a single sin of excess in eating or drinking was fatal to virtue; how, then, is it possible that Christian virtue and perfection will not suffer, when one feasts the whole year round and drinks liquor and other intoxicating drinks to excess?

Besides, there is nothing which so degrades and brutalizes

the human mind, and makes it so incapable of spiritual thoughts, as gluttony. No matter how sharp and clever a young man is, even though he is looked upon as the hope of his family and great things are expected of him, if he indulges in excessive eating and drinking it will be the ruin of him; his brain will soon get fogged, the best part of his time will be spent in sleep and indolence, and he will be incapable of study or reflection.

All these evils we can and must heal by the contrary remedy of fasting and abstinence, which deprives the body of superfluous food and drink. Fasting not only blots out past sin, but also guards against future sins. No matter how deep-rooted our evil habits, how violent our bad inclinations, they will be tamed and kept in check by fasting. Fasting not only prevents sin, but also protects and strengthens us against the attacks of the devil. Even the Son of God, although he could not sin, and therefore required no such protection against his enemy, yet chose to make use of this salutary means, in order to teach us poor mortals, who are exposed on all sides to the attacks of enemies both visible and invisible, how we must have recourse to fasting as a shield to protect ourselves against and to defeat all the temptations of the devil. Therefore: Fast because you have sinned; fast, that you may not sin; fast, that you may receive; fast, that you may keep what you have received. See, there you have the end and object of the Lenten fast, which consists partly in the sorrowful recollection of the sufferings and death which our Saviour endured for us, and in doing penance for our sins; and partly in guarding against future sin, and in acquiring virtue.

In order to attain this twofold object, it is not enough to mortify merely the mouth and stomach by fasting and abstinence; our whole being must have its part in the fast. If your mouth and your stomach have sinned by eating and drinking, make them fast and do penance; but if the other members of your

body have sinned, why should not they also fast? Make them fast. Make your eyes fast; make your ears, hands, feet, tongue, and your soul itself fast, because they have all frequently transgressed the divine commands, and might again lead you into sin. Your eyes have often sinned by dangerous and impure looks; make them fast; forbid them to look, not merely on dangerous and sinful, but even on pleasing objects. Your ears have often sinned by listening to uncharitable and impure conversation and songs; make them fast, so that in future they will be deaf to all vain and idle talk. Your loquacious tongue has often brought you into sin, and into grievous sin, by cursing and swearing, by contumely and abusive language, by criticising the faults of others, by lying and deceit, by dangerous and scandalous words; make it fast, and learn to keep still and silent. Your hands and feet have often sinned, the former by impure touches, the latter by dancing and idle gadding about in company, and in places which are highly dangerous to the soul; make them fast, keep them in retirement at home. Your body has sinned by vanity in dress, and thereby acted in an unchristian manner, and given scandal; let it fast; make it now, at least during this season of penance, when pious Christians are often accustomed to chastise it by disciplines and hair-shirts, make it observe the laws of modesty. It has sinned, too, by idleness and unnecessary sleep, and thereby lost much precious time; make it fast; make it rise early in the morning to praise God. In short, "let us be more temperate in words, in eating and drinking, in sleep and amusements."

But much more should the soul fast and keep itself free from all sin, for otherwise all our fasting will be of little avail. It is useless to bind up the wound while the sharp knife is still sticking in it; the best medicine in the world is of no good as long as one continues to take poison. "What does it avail," says St. Augustine, "to keep the body empty of food, if the soul is full of sin?" What does it avail you to have your face grow

pallid from fasting, if your heart is swollen with impure love, with hatred and envy, with rage and vindictiveness? What does it avail to abstain from meat, if your sharp tongue tears at and destroys your neighbor's good name? Many a one says: I cannot fast, nor can I bear to eat fish; well and good; God will accept your excuse, if it really is as you say, if you are really ill and delicate. But if you forgive from your heart, according to the divine law, him who has offended you, and meet and speak to him in a friendly manner, will that injure your health? Will it give you headache, disorder your stomach, or make you sick? I cannot fast, says a third, because I must work hard to earn my daily bread. Very well, then, God does not require it of you; but this much he insists on, that you restrain your wicked and talkative tongue, that you do not spend the greater part of what you have earned during the week in drinking on Saturdays and Sundays; this you can do; it is a fast that you are bound to observe. In a word, if we are bound during Lent to keep from many things that are quite lawful at other times, are we not much more bound to abstain from that which can never be lawful for us at any time?

Well, then, let us abstain from food, that we may all the better keep from sin. This latter fast is the end and object of the first, and is the reason why the Church has instituted it. The Church now cries out to us in the words of the Apostle: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6 : 2). Woe to us Christians if we turn those days of grace and salvation into days of wrath and condemnation, either by breaking the fast in the matter of food and drink, or by not fasting spiritually from sin and vice!

Lent is a time for sorrow and for recollecting the Passion and death of Christ; let it be, then, for us a time of penance, of tears and of mortification of the flesh; let us observe all this as we ought, exactly. It is a time at which we should die with Christ in a moral sense, by extirpating our vices, raising our

hearts to God and practising virtue. Let us fast honestly, by abstaining from food and drink, so as to mortify the body; but especially by abstaining from sin, that we may save our souls, and after this life of sorrow, and fasting, and penance, rise gloriously with Christ, and celebrate our happy Easter in heaven, amidst eternal joys. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE UNACCOUNTABLE FOLLY OF THOSE WHO INJURE THEIR HEALTH BY EXCESSIVE DRINKING.

When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth."—Luke 11 : 21.

As fasting is useful, nay, even necessary, to all, in order to restrain gluttony in eating, so temperance in drink is even more necessary to most people, in order to avoid excess in that respect; because excess in drink is more fruitful of evil than excess in eating. There is no use in asking you to abstain from drink; I will not do so; but one thing I will ask, and you will not, I hope, refuse me, and that is, that none of you will drink more than he is able. But what a strange thing to say, you will think. Whoever drank more than he was able to drink? From an act we may well conclude its possibility. You drink, therefore you can drink.

Would to God that the conclusion were always true in the right sense! How many of those who are addicted to excessive drinking, nay, almost all of them without exception, drink more than they can—that is, more than their health can bear, more than their income can bear, more than their honor and good name can bear, more than their souls' salvation and the

divine law can bear? Whatever way we look at it, we must acknowledge that they are guilty of great folly and wickedness.

What an unaccountable folly it is to drink more than one's health can bear, as most people do.

Of all the natural gifts that a man can possess on earth there is none so precious, so useful, and agreeable as health and strength, and there is none God has so strictly commanded man to be careful of.

1. There is nothing more useful, because, what better am I for being rich and owning all the treasures of earth, if I have lost my health and must lie ill in bed, and so cannot enjoy my riches? What would it avail me to be a great lord or king, and to rule over many lands, if I am weak and sickly, and have to suffer pain day and night? What pleasure can I have in agreeable company, in exquisite food, in the delights of friendship, or in the beauty of creatures, if my health is gone, and illness turns everything to bitterness for me? No, a piece of dry bread gives more pleasure and satisfaction to a poor man who is in good health, than the daintiest food to a rich man who is ill and suffering.

2. Nothing is more desirable in this mortal life than health, as is evident from the great care we take of it. How cautious we are about going into a house in which there is a person sick of a contagious disease! If it is not absolutely necessary to go there, we prefer to remain away, so great is our dread of breathing an infected atmosphere and carrying the germs of disease away with us. How we dread exposing ourselves to the cold, damp air! That fear is sometimes so great that we dread going to church to hear a Mass or a sermon, lest we should catch cold and be laid up. There is nothing more precious in the natural order than health, as we see at once when we begin to lose it. Money, silver, gold, and anything that can be called

wealth is so dear to the man of the world that no journey is too long for him, no mountain too high, no sea too dangerous for him to cross in search of it. No watchings and labors are counted difficult, as long as he can add to his treasures by means of them. Lawsuits and contentions, hatred and enmity, arise amongst near relations solely on account of the difference between mine and thine. But when there is question of regaining health, although there may be only the faintest spark of hope, all these things are sacrificed without hesitation; if it takes thousands of dollars to buy the necessary medicines, they are sent to the drug store at once; no matter how bitter the medicine is, the patient readily overcomes his dislike and swallows it. Blood-letting, thirst, burning, cutting, all are endured without a murmur, despite the pain they cause; and even he who inflicts those torments is paid for doing so, and thanked into the bargain. And why? Solely for the sake of regaining health. So much do men value the blessing of health.

3. Besides, there is nothing which God has commanded us to look after more carefully than our health and strength. He has even renounced the right he has to our service, when we cannot serve him without injuring our health. All the laws of his Church are suspended when one cannot observe them either on account of actual illness, or through a reasonable fear of it. All Christians are bound under pain of sin to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays; but if you are sick, although you might manage to get as far as the church, or if you are recovering from illness, but still so weak that the cold air might bring on a relapse, then you may remain at home; the law does not bind you; nay, you would even displease God and do wrong by going to Mass under the circumstances. On certain days all Christians are bound under pain of grievous sin to abstain from flesh-meat, and they who have attained the required age are obliged, moreover, to eat only one full meal in the day; but if you are sick, and your health really requires it, you may eat whatever

and as often as you please; you are not obliged to fast; the law does not bind you under those circumstances. I, and all priests are obliged under pain of mortal sin to say the divine Office every day. But if I am ill, if my health is likely to suffer, if I would get a violent headache by reciting the office, I am not bound to do so; I may put my breviary away; God does not wish me to say it; my health has to be considered before his service.

And yet this precious health, so useful to man, so important in the sight of God, how many there are who recklessly ruin and destroy thee! By what? By frequent and excessive drinking. The life that is so precious, and that would not otherwise be readily exposed to danger by any one, is deliberately and wilfully shortened and brought to a premature end by drunkenness. I do not imagine that it will require much to prove that excessive drinking ruins the health, and thereby shortens life. How can it be possible for one who is addicted to drinking too much to remain healthy for a long time? How can a body be healthy, when it is filled with too much drink? Drunkenness is most injurious to the bodily health; drunkenness is a premature old age and a sudden death. "It goeth in pleasantly, but in the end it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk" (Prov. 23 : 31, 32). "By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate shall prolong life" (Ecclus. 37 : 34).

4. I appeal to reason itself and daily experience. Most, nay, nearly all diseases come from ill-digested humors in the stomach; these humors must necessarily arise frequently in a stomach that is constantly surcharged with wine and other strong drinks, which are of their nature apt to heat the blood, and to render the work of digestion very difficult and tedious. Hence the dumb beast, that will not drink unless it is thirsty, and poor people, who are not accustomed to exceed in this particular, are not subject to near so many diseases as those who are

wont to gratify their sensuality on every occasion. How must it then be with those who drink to excess, and even intoxicate themselves every day? All sorts of fevers, diseases of the chest and lungs, dropsy, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, trembling of the limbs and impurity of the blood, although they may in some cases have a different origin, are mostly the effects of excessive drinking.

God has wisely ordained that excessive drinking should be its own punishment, and should cause all those evils to those who are addicted to it, in order that, if they are still capable of using their reason and following its dictates, they may be deterred from indulging in that evil habit. Yet how many there are who are utterly uninfluenced by this consideration! If we drink too much, they say, what else can we expect but to suffer for it? And so they go on drinking down disease after disease, if not at once, at least little by little. Drunkenness is a sign of a strong constitution, which never rests till it is broken down, and a sign of a short memory, which forgets the trouble of getting sober. What unaccountable folly that is—nay, how wicked it is! Food and drink are given to us by our bountiful Creator for the sole purpose of preserving our health and strength, and they are abused through intemperance, and made the means of destroying health and shortening life. How will they who thus become their own murderers answer to God for what they have done? What is the difference between killing a man with one thrust of a dagger, and taking his life by slow poison, when death is sure to follow in either case? Is it a lesser crime to drink one's self to death than to commit suicide by drowning?

5. What blindness it is to drink more than one's health can bear! Tell me, why do you drink so much? Is it not to satisfy the sense of taste? But do you not see that by your excesses you are lessening the pleasure that this sense is capable of feeling, that you are ruining your head and stomach, and that you

will have little pleasure left when your health is gone? What greater folly can there be?

A man invites a number of friends to a feast, and compels them to drink more than they are able to bear; all must drink till they can drink no more. Why do you invite your friends? Is it not to give them pleasure and to show your esteem for them? But how can it please them to be compelled to drink against their will, and to fill themselves up with liquor until they become sick? What sort of friendship is that which shows itself by forcing a man to get drunk, and taking from him the most precious natural good he has—namely, his health? You invite your friend, and then make him take away his life. You ask him to sit at your table, and then force him to drink, as if your greatest wish were to see him carried off to his grave! You call him your dearest friend, and wish him many happy years as you drink his health, and at the same time you sow in him the seeds of a premature death! This is called drinking his health! He who compels another to drink more than is good for him does him more harm than if he were to wound him with a sword; for he thus compels him to lose the health of body and soul. What thanks do you expect from your friend next morning, when he awakens with a splitting headache, for which he knows you are to blame. How can you expect him to be grateful to you, when you have made him sick by dint of drinking his health?

6. Finally, how great the folly of those who allow themselves to be persuaded into drinking more than they can bear, to their own great discomfort, and to the detriment of the health that is so precious to themselves and to their families! Oh, they say, I must do as others do; I do not wish to be the first to interfere with an established custom; I would be ashamed to acknowledge that I could not drink any more, and if I did so I should be laughed at. But what a senseless excuse that is! Let fools laugh, if they will; you have no reason to be ashamed of acting

wisely. Why, then, should you be ashamed if you are unable or unwilling to drink as much as others? Is it an honor to be able to drink more than others? If so, it is an honor which belongs also to a large whiskey cask, which holds more than a smaller one. If it were not so large, it would have nothing to boast about more than the smaller one. It is an honor that a sponge might claim, because it can absorb a great deal of water.

If ever an attempt is made to compel you to drink, think and say: I will not drink more than is good for me; my health and strength are too precious and useful to be thrown away in that unchristian fashion, and against my will, too. You often allege your health as an excuse when the law of the Church obliges you to fast, when the bell rings for Mass on a cold winter's morning, or that you fear to injure your health by going. Why, then, should not the same excuse hold good when there is question, not of devotion, or of the divine service, but of being compelled to indulge in drunkenness and intemperance, contrary to the law of God? Therefore, in the future act on that, and no sensible man can think the worse of you for so doing. Rather be a martyr of temperance, although you thus incur the ridicule of foolish men, than ruin your health and become a torment to yourself through a foolish desire of excelling others in drunken excess. Thus you shall preserve not only the health of your body, but also that of your immortal soul. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE SHAMEFUL MALICE OF THOSE WHO IMPOVERISH THEMSELVES AND INJURE THEIR GOOD NAME BY EXCESSIVE DRINKING.

"Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"—John 6 : 5.

Poor people, who were reduced to such extremities that they were hungry and had not bread to eat! And yet it was their zeal in following Christ, in order to hear his word, that brought them to such a pass; therefore, our Lord, who never abandons his servants who trust in him, took pity on them, and wrought a miracle to supply them with food. How many there are nowadays who bring themselves to the direst poverty, so that they must cry out: "Whence shall we buy bread that we may eat?" not through zeal in following Christ, but through a wilful desire of satisfying their inordinate appetites, through which they and their families must often suffer the pangs of hunger. Certainly God will not work a miracle to help such people! I allude to those inveterate drunkards who drink until they reduce themselves and those belonging to them to beggary. For

I. There are many who drink more than their incomes allow.

II. There are many who drink more than is good for their honor and reputation.

I. An industrious father of a family, who lives decently according to his condition, but practises due economy, can save a great deal and support himself and those who depend on him with very little expense. It is quite the contrary with inveter-

ate drunkards; they squander away all they have, until they are not able to meet their household expenses, and have to be satisfied with very poor fare in the end. "He that loveth good cheer shall be in want; he that loveth wine and fat things shall not be rich" (Prov. 21 : 27). For he who drinks frequently and copiously, must often pull out his purse. Besides, a drunkard can never repair his losses; because, even if he got his drink for nothing, he makes himself incapable of attending to his business, by which he has to support himself and his family. A drunkard is unfit for any kind of business; he is good for nothing but drinking and spending money. What can this lead to but ruin? No matter how great a treasure is, if there is something taken out of it every day, and nothing added to it, it must soon be exhausted.

What madness it is to pour down one's throat in a day what would suffice to supply one decently with food and drink for three or four days, and to exhaust in a few years by excessive drinking what could have supported one's self and family for a whole lifetime! And here I must express my heartfelt pity for those men who have a wife and family to support, and have no other means of doing so but their daily labor, but who, being given to drink, take the wages they earn to the saloon, and generally drink in one Sunday all they have earned for the week; who drink in one day the labor and sweat of many days; meanwhile they have hardly a decent coat to their backs, or bread and water enough to keep body and soul together during the week; and when they come to old age, or sickness comes on, so that they are unable to work, they have not a penny in their pockets to buy a piece of bread for themselves and their families.

But far greater is my pity for the unfortunate wives and families who are brought to extreme poverty by those drunken men, and who have to suffer hunger and thirst at home, while those who should provide for them are swilling wine or beer in

the saloon, thus verifying the words of St. Paul: "And one, indeed, is hungry, and another is drunk" (1 Cor. 11 : 21). What a crying injustice that is! They to whom God has entrusted a wife and children, to be supported as well as possible according to their condition, are the very ones who make away with what belongs to their wives and children, and reduce them to beggary! And, unfortunately, that is of only too common occurrence! If it is a sin of injustice to steal even the least thing from a rich man, who would not miss it, what a fearful sin it must be for a father thus to rob his own children, whom he has begotten, and his wife, with whom he should be one body and one soul!

Even if temporal poverty and distress were the only evils you cause, it would not matter so much. But your cruelty goes farther than that; you bring eternal death on your families and occasion the loss of their souls, a not unfrequent result of your drunken excesses. I do not speak now of the scandal you give when you come home in a state of intoxication, and curse and swear and ill-treat your wives and children; nor of the sins into which your children are led by your neglecting to give them a proper Christian training; I speak only of the contempt that they must feel for you, although they are bound to honor you; of the hatred they must have for you, although they are bound to love you; of the curses they call down on your heads, although they ought to pray for you; of the little care they will take of you, when they have succeeded in raising themselves by their diligence, out of the poverty into which they were plunged by your drunkenness and intemperance. For how could they have any affection for a father who has shown so little love and tenderness to his own flesh and blood? How can they act as children to him who has not been as a father to them? How can they acknowledge their obligation to support and help him who, by his drunkeness, has left them nothing but poverty and misery as their portion?

II. Honor and life are generally looked upon as of the same value; nay, many a one values his good name more than his life, so that he is ready to expose his life to a thousand dangers for the sake of preserving or gaining his honor. No one, unless he is the most degraded of men, will allow the least stain to affect his honor.

And yet this honor is utterly ruined by excessive drinking; for what is more disgraceful than to have the name of being a drunkard? What more loathsome object is there than a drunken man? A beautiful girl used to amuse herself by playing on the flute, but one day, happening to catch the reflection of her face in a pond of clear water, and seeing how it was disfigured by the flute, she became so disgusted with that instrument that she gave it up altogether. I think that if one who is created to the image and likeness of God, and who, therefore, is made only for heavenly things, could see himself and the actions he does when in a state of intoxication, clearly reflected in a mirror, he would be ashamed of himself, and if he had a spark of honorable feeling left would give up drinking at once. It was in that way that the Lacedaemonians tried to deter their children from drunkenness; they used to make a slave drunk and let him go staggering about in that condition, in presence of their children; so that the latter, seeing how unbecomingly he acted, and how unworthy of a reasoning being, might have a horror and dread of excessive drinking. And, in fact, if one who knew nothing of this vice were suddenly to see a drunken man, he would take him for a wild beast, or at least for a madman. And, after all, what difference is there between a drunken man and a madman, unless that the latter was involuntarily deprived of the use of reason, while the former deliberately deprives himself of it?

A drunkard is a disgrace to humanity. And what greater shame can there be than to degrade human nature from its dignity? Man is created to the image and likeness of God; he

is only a little inferior to the Angels and princes of heaven in dignity: "Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels" (Ps. 8 : 6). But when he is drunk, what trace of the divine image can be discerned in him? He is, so to speak, no longer a man; he is not a whit better than a beast; and while he is in that condition, how can he be distinguished from a beast? By his eyes, ears, hands or feet? But wild beasts have all these, too, and they make far better use of them than a drunken man does. It is reason alone, by which we think, and judge, and discern, that raises our nature almost immeasureably above that of the brute creation. If we lose our reason, as is the case with the drunkard, we are no better than the beasts. Nay, one could wish that the drunkard were as good! How much better is an ass or a dog than a drunken man! And why? Because those animals will not drink more than is necessary to slake their thirst; you may beat an ass as long as you please, once he has had enough he will not take a drop more. You can take a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink. You, therefore, oh, drunkards, are worse than beasts, for you drink six times, ten times, more than your necessity requires or your means allow.

That is true, they will say; but the vice is so common nowadays that there is no disgrace in it; we are all in the one boat. They even make a boast of it, and think it a fine thing to be drunk. Alas! that the wickedness of the world should go so far as to make a boast of a vice that is condemned by God and by nature, and abhorred by unreasoning animals; and that even Christians should not hesitate to boast of it! It may easily happen that a respectable man once or twice in company gets a little overcome by drink, on account of bodily weakness, or because he is off his guard; he does not thereby disgrace himself, he rather deserves to be pitied; but I am not speaking of such cases as that. I speak only of those who are habitual drunkards, and who are seldom to be seen sober. There is no

respectable man who will tell me that those are men of honor and worthy of esteem; and there is no one who will deny that all decent people look on them as disgraced. When the Pharisees failed to find any other accusation against our Lord, they said that he was a drunkard, in spite of his perfect sobriety and temperance; when they saw him at the marriage feast at Cana, at the house of Martha in Bethania, with Matthew and Zacheus, who were public sinners, with the rich Pharisee and many others, they took occasion from his presence at those feasts to try to ruin his character. "Behold," said they, "this man is a glutton and a wine-drinker" (Matt. 11 : 19). This false accusation of theirs was the means they made use of to lessen at least his reputation, if they could not take it away altogether. Therefore, he who is habitually addicted to intemperance cannot be esteemed by any one, except, perhaps, by the companions of his carousals; and that is an esteem such as thieves have for the most daring and lawless of their gang. Although the judgments of the world are mostly vain and false, yet there is no one of common sense who does not at once condemn and look down upon him who has the reputation of being a drunkard.

A drunkard, I have said; that is, a drunken man; for I do not dare to suggest even the possibility of that vice being found amongst women. A drunken woman! What a horrible thing even to imagine! There is nothing so disgraceful to a woman as to say that she is given to drink. For, if she is addicted to that vice, what is to become of her household duties, of the education of her children, and of the necessary watchfulness over her servants? How can the mistress of a family perform these duties if she is given to intemperance? Every one sees at once, without further proof, that under the circumstances the ruin of the family is certain, and hence amongst many nations it was the custom to forbid the use of wine to women under the severest penalties. Christian women, I cannot, nor is it my inten-

tion to, forbid you to drink; but if you are determined to enjoy the good things that God has given you, do so, in God's name, without forgetting the temperance that becomes a Christian woman. My only object is to show that all, men and women, who exceed in the use of intoxicating drinks, destroy their health, ruin their families, and bring disgrace upon themselves.

I conclude with the warning of St. Peter: "Be sober and watch, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5 : 8). Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE GUILT AND SINFUL EFFECTS OF HABITUAL DRUNKENNESS.

"*Which of you shall convince me of sin?*"—John 8 : 46.

To drink more than one's health or income or reputation can bear, is folly, wickedness, and a shame! And yet it is an ordinary consequence of excessive drinking. Important as this consideration is, it would not matter much if the salvation of the soul and the law of God were not concerned also. For the worst of all the evil consequences of excessive drinking, which should be most effective to deter Christians from that vice, is, that most people drink more than is consistent with the salvation of their souls. But here some may be inclined to say, like our Lord in to-day's Gospel, "which of you shall convince me of sin"? What nonsense to say that it is a sin to drink a drop too much now and then! So common has this vice become that it is no longer looked upon as sinful. My object now is to

show how false and wrong that idea is. I will convince you of sin.

I. Deliberate drunkenness is always a mortal sin.

II. The habit of drinking much, although not to actual drunkenness, is very often a mortal sin.

I. By perfect drunkenness I mean such a darkening of the reason through excessive drinking that one is incapable of doing a reasonable act. It is in excess in drinking, without just and grievous cause, by which a man knowingly and wilfully deprives himself by violence and fully of the use of reason. In the first place it is called an excess in drinking, which is to be understood according to the capacity of each individual to bear a greater or smaller quantity of intoxicating drink. That quantity, therefore, whether it be great or small, is to be considered as excessive and as the cause of drunkenness, which in any individual case obscures the reason. Secondly, it must be without just cause; thus it is not a sin to take a medicine which deprives one for a time of the use of reason, or to get drunk if the doctor thinks it necessary for the recovery of health, because such a deprivation of reason arises from a just cause, namely, the avoidance of illness or the recovery of health. Thirdly, the deprivation of reason must be wilful and deliberate; therefore, if a man, either because it is the first time, or because he has good reason for so judging from past experience, thinks that what he is about to drink will not hurt him, although through illness, or the strength of the wine of which he knew nothing, or through coming out suddenly into the fresh air, his reason is actually affected, as frequently happens, such a man is not guilty, because he did not foresee nor intend that drunkenness should follow from his act. Fourthly, I have said, "by violence." He who lies down to sleep at night also deprives himself of the use of reason, not, however, violently, but in the manner appointed by God, so that when he awakes he

is at once ready to use his reason again. Fifthly, I have said that one must deprive himself "fully" of the use of reason; therefore, although the imagination is somewhat disturbed, and the tongue stammers and the eyes see double, and the feet are rather uncertain, nay, even though the stomach is forced to reject the wine that one has drank, as long as the reason is capable of acting and reflecting there is not perfect and mortally sinful drunkenness, provided there has been no wish or intention of getting drunk. Drunkenness, then, consists in the total deprivation of the use of reason deliberately and wilfully caused or foreseen, and is a mortal sin.

Man always carries about with him a very precious image, namely, his reason. What a beautiful and costly image it is! And whose is it? It is the image of the Almighty God, who has given it to man as a token of his love. Now, if earthly lords are justly offended when an insult is offered to their coat-of-arms, although it is made only of wood or stone, do you think that the great God, who is so jealous of his honor and glory, and who cannot bear to see men offering the flesh of an animal to an idol, can see without displeasure his own living image wantonly disgraced and dishonored. And could a greater insult be offered to that image than to degrade it to the condition of a senseless creature, or of a beast, by drunkenness? What can be more degrading to a man than to bear the likeness of an irrational animal? What can be more degrading to the image of God than to turn it into the image of a beast? Is it likely that God will allow this injury to go unavenged? And is that a mere trifling sin, and one that we need not think much of? No, not without cause has God in his anger threatened woes and maledictions: "Woe to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness, and to drink till the evening to be inflamed with wine." "Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds" (Is. 5 : 11, 14). And "Who hath woe? Surely they that pass

their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups" (Prov. 23 : 29, 30). Nor shall drunkards possess the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6 : 10).

There is still another characteristic in drunkenness which distinguishes it from other sins, and brings out its gravity more clearly; and it is this, that it makes man incapable of doing penance and being converted to God, and thus places the soul in certain danger of eternal damnation, when the time comes for him to leave this life. Suppose that a drunken man is overtaken by a mortal illness, or that he is grievously wounded, or otherwise reduced to the last extremity; how could he prepare for death and the journey into eternity? In any other circumstances, when the Lord knocks at the door, if, like the foolish virgins, we have no oil in our lamps, as long as there is a spark of life left we have time to go and buy some; that is to say, if a mortal illness were to surprise us when engaged in the commission of any other sin, we might at least make an act of contrition with the heart, if we are not able to make our confession, and thus obtain pardon, though it is not likely that we should do so under the circumstances, and hardly one in a thousand finds pardon for his sins because he cannot use his reason. He is utterly incapable of receiving any Sacraments as long as he is in that state, and, of course, if he dies before becoming sober, there is no place for his soul but hell. And this is the reason why it is not lawful to drink to excess before going to bed at night, when one foresees that complete drunkenness is likely to ensue during sleep; because thereby one deprives himself wilfully of the use of reason, and consequently is not able under all circumstances to attend to the salvation of his soul.

"Drunkards shall not possess the kingdom of God;" and you say that drunkenness does not matter much, that it is a general failing, and that it cannot be a great sin! Is it not a great sin, when God excludes men from heaven on account of it? If it is a general custom, and is therefore regarded as a trivial fault,

so much the worse, so much the more is the evil to be deplored. You say that you are not the only one who drinks too much; is your sin any less on that account? Is that a reason why you should expect to be punished less severely for it? A soldier deserts, and induces twenty of his comrades to follow his example. If he is caught he will certainly be hung. Oh, he thinks, what does it matter? I am not the only one. No, you are not the only one, but you will see whether death will be any easier for you because you have twenty companions hanging on the gallows beside you!

II. To place one's self deliberately in the proximate occasion and danger of sin is the same thing as to commit the sin; although in reality the sin is not committed. And the proximate occasion consists in those circumstances in which certain individuals know by experience that they always, or at least very often, fall into sin. Now, there is very little doubt that excessive drinking, although it does not take away the use of reason, is yet a fruitful source of many sins. You can use your own eyes and ears, and learn from your own experience. There are some, and, in fact, very many, who become quite friendly when they have drunk too much; but they are a great deal too friendly and too free in their conversation, far more so than is consistent with Christian modesty, or virginal or conjugal purity. With reason does St. Augustine say that wine, taken to excess, is "the shipwreck of chastity." Where are you most likely to hear unchaste jests, filthy talk and immodest songs, if not in saloons? Many a town would be freed from a great deal of impurity, seduction of the innocent, scandal and adultery if liquor were not so much used. Others grow quite talkative when tipsy, and reveal what was told them in confidence, thus doing much harm; nor do they hesitate to say boldly what they think of others, thereby injuring their neighbor's reputation. In fact, loquacity is so usual in a tipsy man that it would be a

wonder indeed if a man in that state could manage to keep his unruly tongue in order. There are others who grow abusive when drunk. They curse and swear, and use all sorts of hard words against their neighbor, and, worse than all, they blaspheme their Creator! Others, again, become prodigal; they give away all they have, and drink and gamble until they have spent what ought to go to the support of their families. Others become irascible and quarrelsome, and are not easy until they have succeeded in picking a quarrel with some one; they have not a friendly word for any one, and thus give rise to hatred, enmity, and often murder. Others become so cruel and heartless that they ill-treat their parents, wives, and children, so that very often the poor wife has to sit trembling at home while her husband is drinking in the saloon, knowing well that when he comes home he will beat and abuse her, as if she were a naughty child who deserved punishment. It is clear that these and many other effects of excessive drinking are sinful, and mortally sinful. Therefore, he who knows by experience that immoderate drinking causes those effects in him, is bound under pain of mortal sin to avoid excessive drinking, although he does not intend to deprive himself fully of the use of reason.

I pity you unhappy wives who have to suffer poverty, or ill-treatment, through your drunken husbands. Hard as your state is, it is not that which excites my pity, for it is a cross that God has laid on your shoulders for the salvation of your souls, and that you may earn much glory in heaven, if you only make use of the opportunity, and practise patience and resignation to the will of God. There is, however, one thought which could make me shed tears of blood, and that is, that you turn this occasion of gaining merit for your souls into an occasion of eternal damnation to yourselves by your excessive impatience and despair; for it often happens that you go from temporal into eternal suffering! For how do you sometimes act when your husbands come home, half or wholly drunk? Do you not

often abuse and curse them, and call them drunken beasts, and call down all sorts of imprecations on them, and give utterance to everything that your anger suggests? What do you gain by such conduct? Your husbands, who are already not in a disposition to bear the least word of contradiction, on account of the state in which they are, return you curse for curse, and abuse for abuse; and so you become an occasion of additional sin. And what better are you for it? You get a sound drubbing, and, sooth to say, you richly deserve it! Do you know how you should act? That is no time for reproof or remonstrance; as the saying is, if a man meets a wagon loaded with hay, he has nothing to do but to get out of its way; and so also you should give way to your husbands when they are too full of drink. You must hold your tongues, give way, return soft answers, say that it is a good thing to take a drop now and then, and bear ill-treatment with patience; there is no better plan for you to adopt. The next day, when the fumes of the liquor have disappeared, and you think your husbands are in a better humor, you can remonstrate with them with humility, modesty and love, and beg of them to amend and to cease causing you such suffering. If that does not help you, then you must pray earnestly to the Lord of hearts, that he may give your husbands the grace of conversion. Resign yourselves humbly and patiently to the will of God; unite your trials with the bitter Passion and death of Jesus Christ, recall your past lives and see whether you have not perhaps committed some grievous sins, and accept your sufferings as a punishment for them from the hands of God.

"Awake, ye that are drunk," I say to you, oh, drunkards, for the last time, "and weep and mourn all ye that take delight in drinking sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth" (Joel 1 : 5). Weep and mourn over your unhappy and almost desperate state! Acknowledge and bewail the madness with which you ruin your health, your fortunes, and your good

name! Bemoan your wickedness with tears of repentance, and atone for the many sins you have committed by intemperance! Weep as Esau did, when he satisfied his gluttony by selling his birthright for a mess of pottage; for you have given up your eternal inheritance in heaven, that you may indulge your inordinate desires! Weep, and beg of God with all humility to avert the woes that will surely fall upon your heads, unless you repent! Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY.

INGRATITUDE A VICE HATEFUL TO GOD.

"*Mary Magdalen, and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus.*"—Mark 16 : 1.

How strange that no one but these three pious women resolved to show the last honors to our dead Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to anoint his sacred Body in the sepulchre. And yet there must have been many people in the city of Jerusalem on whom our Lord had conferred great benefits during his life. Did none of them go to the sepulchre? No; they had already forgotten his benefits; in fact, many of them were amongst those who cried out to Pilate: "Crucify him! crucify him!" With reason might our Lord have complained on this occasion, as he did when he cured the ten lepers and only one of them returned to thank him: "There is no one found to return and give glory to God but this stranger" (Luke 17 : 18). All my friends have abandoned me; there is no one to pay me the last honors but those three women. That very complaint was a common one at all times, and in our own days, too, it is

common enough; namely, that gratitude for benefits received is such a rare thing in the world. Sir Thomas More, the great English chancellor and martyr, used to say that "we write benefits on sand and injuries on marble;" that is, we never forget injuries, while benefits soon disappear from our memory. My words to-day will be directed against ingratitude, of which most men are guilty toward God, and I say:

Ingratitude toward God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God.

It is not ingratitude for one who has received a benefit to make no return for it, if it is impossible for him to do so, as long as he humbly acknowledges the obligation he is under, and honors, praises and loves his benefactor. Ingratitude is hateful to every one; the earth brings forth no greater monster than an ungrateful man, and there is nothing so displeasing to God as ingratitude. We have an instance of this in the lepers: "Were not ten made clean?" said our Lord with displeasure, when he saw that the stranger was the only one who returned to thank him, "and where are the nine?" The reason of his asking that question was to show how he disliked and detested ingratitude.

Ingratitude blocks the way against grace, and grace finds no entrance where it is. Imagine the state of one who has a passionate affection for another: he desires nothing more than to please the object of his love, and to shower benefits of all kinds upon him. But nothing troubles him more than to find that the latter attaches no value to his proffered services, or that other people interfere to prevent him from bestowing his favors on the object of his love. Now, there is no created thing which has a stronger natural tendency to bestow itself on others than God has to shower down his graces and blessings on all, especially his rational creatures. What violence can set bounds to the Omnipotent, and compel him to restrain his wishes and

desires, so that he may not distribute his benefits as he wills? He is the Lord of all, and who can resist him? No angel in heaven, no demon in hell, no power on earth. Ingratitude alone is able to do this; for its hateful malice violently binds the hands of the good God, so to speak, and keeps them closed, so that they dare not show their generosity and bestow their blessings.

Another circumstance that increases the malice and deformity of ingratitude is the fact that it steals away from God the only good that he expects from his rational creatures, namely, their grateful recognition of his benefits, and the honor and love they owe him. In order to show his people how unjust they were to him in this respect, he says publicly to them by David: "Hear, oh, my people, and I will speak, oh, Israel, and I will testify to thee; I am God, thy God. I will not reproach thee for thy sacrifices: and thy burnt-offerings are always in my sight. I will not take calves out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy flocks. For all the beasts of the woods are mine, and the cattle on the hills, and the oxen. I know all the fowls of the air, and with me is the beauty of the field. If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fulness thereof. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows to the most High. Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 49 : 7-16). Turn whither you will, look about you on all sides, you can find nothing with which to make a return to God for the benefits he has conferred on you, unless what he already possesses. There is only one thing which God has left to your free will, and which he can receive from you, namely, the gratitude and thankfulness, the honor and love that you owe him for the countless blessings he has bestowed on you; this is the only return that God expects. Ungrateful man, who either refuse to acknowledge the benefits you have received from God,

or forget them, or even return evil for them, see how you take from God by your ingratitude the tribute of honor and praise which is due to him for so many reasons, and which is the only one he expects.

Behold the hideous deformity and injustice of the ingratitude of which you are guilty; inasmuch as you refuse to make to God that return which you could make him so easily at any moment, and which depends on your own free will. In the Old Law God forbade fish to be offered as a sacrifice to him. Why? Are there not good fish which have a delicate flavor? There are, but they cannot be caught without trouble, and therefore God did not wish to have them offered to him in sacrifice, because he requires no gift from us mortals, unless one that is always at the disposal of our free will, so that we can offer it to him with little trouble. For the same reason, too, he would not accept wild animals in sacrifice, because it takes some trouble to hunt them. All he required was what people had at hand every day, such as oxen, sheep, goats and other domestic animals. He would accept no birds but doves, because they were tame and easily caught. And now in the New Law God has abolished all those sacrifices among Christians, because it would be too difficult for the poor to provide them; and he is perfectly satisfied to receive from us, as a return for the benefits he has conferred on us, what we can give him without the least difficulty, namely, our grateful acknowledgement of his goodness.

How much easier it is to show gratitude to God than to man! How much more is required to satisfy a mere mortal for some trifling service he has rendered than to satisfy God for the countless benefits he bestows on us at every moment! Let a rich man say to his lawyer, who has gained an important case for him, or to his doctor, who has cured him of a dangerous illness: Sir, I thank you, and will always be grateful to you for what you have done me; I will never forget you, and during

my whole life I shall hold you in special honor and esteem. Oh, the other would answer, that is all very fine; but what is the good of your gratitude or esteem to me? It will not fill my purse, nor help me to support my family. I have used my skill and knowledge, and given myself a great deal of trouble for you; I have therefore earned a certain amount of money, to which I am justly entitled, and I should be very glad indeed if you paid me; you can then be as grateful to me as you will, and hold me in esteem, if that is any satisfaction to you. But the God of goodness, from whom we have received everything good we have, is content with that which hardly any one in the world would consider a sufficient return for an act of kindness! God does not want a reward, but honor and gratitude.

A great number of men are ungrateful to God, for they do not acknowledge his benefits. If it is ingratitude not to acknowledge one's benefactor, or the favors received from him, how many there are who are blessed with special gifts of the soul, such as good understanding and memory, prudence and skill; of the body, such as health and strength, and beauty, and who have besides temporal blessings of fortune, such as riches; how many there are of that kind who never think that they owe all they have to God, and never dream of showing him the gratitude they owe him? Riches they look on as the fruit of their own labor, or as an inheritance they receive as a matter of course from their ancestors; the gifts of body and soul they consider only as objects of a vain self-complacency. Everything they possess they use like swine feeding in the forest, which wander about all day eating all the acorns they can find, and when they are filled lie down to sleep without once looking up to the beneficent tree that furnished them with such abundance of food.

If it is ingratitude to forget the benefits one has received, oh, what bad memories we have in this particular! While Pharao's butler was still in prison with Joseph, who interpreted

his dream, there was no end of his promises to speak to the king for him. But in spite of all his promises, as soon as he was set at liberty he forgot all about Joseph, who had to languish in prison for two years more. As long as we have the gifts of God directly before our eyes, that is, while we are actually receiving them from his hand, then we thank him, if we have so much gratitude left; but hardly have we turned our backs and enjoyed what was given us, than we completely forget our Benefactor.

Oh, that we could always say with truth: I have offended my God by sin, and been ungrateful to him; I have returned him evil for good, but I am heartily sorry for it, and will never do so again! Which of the two has the greater reason to be thankful to God: he who has never committed a mortal sin, or he who, having committed mortal sin, has received the grace to repent and thus to save his soul from hell? Is it not a precious grace, that of preserving one's baptismal innocence, so that one has never lost heaven? Certainly, this grace is in itself the more excellent and rare, and is more to be desired than the grace of repentance; still, since this latter grace is less due to him who has offended God grievously, and since God has less reason for giving such a grace to his enemy, whom he could at once and without further delay hurl into hell, the converted sinner has more reason to thank God than the innocent man, who never deserved hell. And even after the benefit of having their sins forgiven they offend God by fresh sins. Is not absolution given in the holy Sacrament of Penance to hundreds of thousands of sinners? And amongst that great number there are hardly a few who prove their gratitude as they ought for such a benefit; hardly a few who endeavor to continue in the grace and friendship of God by serving him zealously; hardly a few who do not return to their former sins and vices! After all these benefits there is hardly one who makes a proper return to God. Where are the nine whom he has made clean? Where

are all the sinners whom he has freed from hell? They are in the same state as before, in their former sins. They are as full as ever of pride and vanity, of avarice, usury and injustice, of impurity, through which they seduce many immortal souls; of hatred and vindictiveness, of gluttony and drunkenness, of swearing, cursing, fault-finding and blasphemy; nay, they are worse than before.

If we have hitherto failed to acknowledge our sovereign Benefactor as he deserves, let us henceforth show him our gratitude whenever he sees fit to send us trials and crosses by bearing them with patience; and let us not forget that it serves us right to be so tried on account of our past ingratitude to so good a God. If we have hitherto forgotten the divine benefits, let not a day pass in future on which we shall not remember them in order to return due thanks for them. If we have hitherto made a bad return to God for his goodness to us, let us now make atonement by avoiding even the least wilful sin, by serving him more zealously, by doing his will more exactly, and by loving him more sincerely. Let no word proceed from our mouths, no work from our hands, no thought from itself in our minds without being directed by a supernatural intention to his honor and glory; so that, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, we may "offer the sacrifice of praise always to God" (Hebr. 3 : 15). Amen.

First Sunday After Easter.

PARTIES, BALLS, NIGHTLY PROMISCUOUS GATHERINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

"*Jesus came and stood in the midst.*"—John 20 : 19.

Jesus stood in the midst of his Apostles, in the room in which they had shut themselves up for fear of the Jews, and in which they were talking of Christ. Jesus is never to be found in the company of those who, without fear or shame, place themselves in the danger of sin; because he who without necessity runs into such danger, will not long preserve the grace of God. There is a certain kind of company that seems to many not at all dangerous, although it is the most dangerous of all—that is, the company of young people of both sexes, who meet at night to amuse themselves; call it what you please, ball or party, or anything else; I call it, in plain language, a nightly promiscuous gathering of young people for the purpose of amusement. If what I have to say offends any of you, I hope you will forgive me; the danger that threatens your precious souls and the duty of my office force me to speak of this matter in order to satisfy my conscience. I do not envy or grudge you your enjoyments, but rather wish you from my heart all kinds of joy in abundance, provided there is no danger to your souls.

These nightly gatherings are very dangerous occasions of sin.

The holy Fathers condemn those parties as sinful abuses. Tertullian and St. Cyprian, who lived near the time of the Apostles, condemn these gatherings as unchristian and heathenish. St. John Chrysostom, having once heard that some of

his hearers frequented them, began his sermon by declaring that if he knew who they were he would turn them out of the Church, and would not allow them to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. St. Augustine says that it is a far less grievous sin to work on a Sunday or holyday until one is tired than to be present at a dance. I dare not quote what St. Ambrose calls the young woman who goes to a dance. Gerson says that "all sins and vices are to be found in dancing."

But, you say, there are none but respectable people admitted, and decorum is strictly observed. I believe it; nor do I imagine for a moment that those gatherings are composed simply of vulgar boors, who meet together to carouse and indulge in all sorts of improper conduct. But I am not quite certain that your parties are not all the more dangerous precisely because they have an air of external propriety, and that they do even more harm than a mere vulgar carouse.

You say there is no harm in those parties. But what do you mean by that? Do you think there is no harm done unless some sinful act or dissipation is outwardly indulged in? You are right in saying that nothing of the kind occurs during those parties, but what are we to think of what occurs after them? In any case, you cannot say there is no harm in dangerous imaginations, thoughts, desires and pleasures. Does not our Lord himself expressly tell us: "But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5 : 25). Now, is it possible, humanly speaking, for every one who frequents such gatherings to avoid all sinful thoughts and desires? The Holy Scripture admonishes us over and over again to turn away our eyes from persons of the opposite sex, that we may not sully our minds. "Gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling block to thee" (Eccles. 9 : 5). "Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not about upon another's beauty; for hereby lust is enkindled as a fire" (Eccles. 9 : 8, 9).

Job teaches us the same by his example: "I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not so much as think upon a virgin" (Job 31 : 1). How, then, can you possibly keep your hearts and minds pure and your thoughts unsullied in the midst of the most dangerous familiarities, where young people see each other not merely by chance and for a moment, but for six, seven or eight hours at a time, which they spend in talking, laughing, dancing, and amusing themselves; where not only the eyes, but all the senses, find something to delight and captivate them, and where all the surroundings are such as to foster sensual thoughts and desires?

What are those surroundings? The time chosen is the night, when the artificial light cast on surrounding objects makes them appear more beautiful than they really are and thus excites the imagination. Those who are invited are people who by their amiable manners contribute to the general amusement, and do all they can to appear beautiful in the eyes of others; half the day is spent in dressing and adorning themselves. Their talk and conversation are full of honied words and winning flatteries; they assume a gay and cheerful expression of countenance; their very gestures and the postures they take express their willingness to be of service to one another. And the reason of all this is that they are bent on amusement. But if, according to the Word of God, even a single look is dangerous, how can it be reasonably supposed that the devil does not make use of such occasions to lay many a snare? If the passions of young people are so easily excited, what can be expected when there are so many things tending to flatter the passions? What vain complacency in their own appearance and in that of others those young hearts must feel! What dangerous joy, hope, desire, and pride must be awakened in those who find that they are most admired and praised. What envy, fear and suspicion in those who think they are neglected or slighted! What thoughts and imaginations, that remain even till the fol-

lowing day! What wishes and longings to see the person whom one is especially anxious to please! These and similar things, which it does not become me to mention here, are the evils that those gatherings give rise to, almost as a matter of necessity.

But, some will say, you are talking to us now of things we never heard of before. We never experienced any of those effects you speak of; we amuse and divert ourselves at those gatherings with the greatest peace of soul and conscience; nor are we troubled by the least bad thought. If that be the case, then God be praised! We must treat you, then, not as mortals imprisoned in a corruptible body, but as pure Angels, who are above all the attacks of sensuality. Hear it, oh, holy hermits! Hear it, all ye Saints! In our days people are far better; they can allow their senses all kinds of liberty, and spend whole nights together dancing, laughing and amusing themselves, without being troubled even with a bad thought! If you had been as wise as they, might you not have had an easier time of it?

Vain children of the world, that learned and holy man, St. Jerome, was afraid of losing his soul through an incautious glance at a person of the opposite sex; and you, in the fire of youth and in the midst of attractions and seductions, maintain that you have nothing of the kind to fear, that you are free from all temptations, and that you are not troubled even with an impure thought! Is your nature, then, different from that of other men? Is your flesh better tamed and brought under subjection by fasting and other penitential works than that of a St. Jerome, or of so many other holy hermits, who were afraid of dangers that were far less to be dreaded than those you expose yourselves to, without, as you say, being in the least afraid?

But, you say, we must live according to the general custom of people in the world. If I were always to refuse to go to

those parties, what would people think of me? They would look on me as a hypocrite. What custom are you talking about? You are laboring under a great mistake! There are many large and wealthy cities where such a custom is unknown; and everywhere you will find many people of respectability and common sense who refuse to have anything to do with those parties, and who prevent those under their charge from going to them. Why do you not follow the custom of those people? Why should bad customs have more influence over you than good ones? If you were invited to go to early morning devotions, to go to confession and Communion every week, which are all good and pious Christian customs: Oh, dear me! you would say, I cannot manage it; it is too early; I should not have time to dress. But you can spend whole nights together at those parties dacing and amusing yourselves, without ever complaining that it is too early or too late; and the day before you always manage to find time enough to do your work. This is an evident sign of a vain mind, that is not influenced or directed by the spirit of God.

It is the custom, you insist. So much the worse! There are many customs in the world that are not good, and if you wish to go to heaven, you must not live according to them. Our Lord warns us by his Apostles not to live according to the customs of the world. "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2 : 15). "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12 : 2), says St. Paul. "Know you not," asks St. James, "that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God" (James 4 : 4). If, then, you think that because such parties are in vogue nearly everywhere, you must have your share in them, too, why do you not also think that you must go to hell, since it is the fashion in every town in the world for many people to go there?

One conclusion is just as good as the other. God tells us that "We must not be conformed to this world," and you maintain that we must live according to the customs of the world. Who is right, God or you? You yourselves have renounced the world in Baptism; why should you live according to it now? Who introduced those abuses among Christians? The devil.

You have but one soul, and if you lose that it will not hurt or benefit me. You have but one soul, and if you lose it, you have lost everything for all eternity. What good will the pleasure of half a day or a night be to you, nay, what good would the whole world be to you, with all its pleasures, if your soul suffers the least harm? If you wish to enjoy yourselves, do so in God's name, but do not risk your soul for the sake of enjoyment. Heaven is the place for enjoyment; there the Lord invites you to a feast which will last forever amid unspeakable joys, which you will share with the holy Angels. Ah, do not so act as to be excluded from that gathering, or so that you will go unprepared into eternity, that you may not meet with the fate of the foolish virgins, to whom the Bridegroom said: "I know you not." Prepare your souls now for this heavenly Bridegroom, and endeavor to please him alone, so that you may merit to be invited to the nuptials of the spotless Lamb. That joy I wish you, and to myself, with all my heart. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE PUNISHMENT OF INGRATITUDE.

"*I know mine.*"—John 10 : 14.

Happy the souls whom the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will recognize as his on the last day, and who, being placed on the right hand of the Judge, shall hear the joyful invitation: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you" (Matt. 25 : 34). Woe to the great number who will not be recognized by Christ on that day! But why? Does he not know each and every one? Yes, but he does not know all as his own. There are many to whom he has already said what he will repeat to them on the judgment day, "I know you not," and they are those who, during life, have not wished to know God or to honor him, but who preferred to drive him away from them by their wickedness. Amongst the number of these are especially the ungrateful, who are like the ten lepers who were cleansed, and of whom only one returned to give thanks to our Lord: "Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?" (Luke 17 : 17.) Such was the question our Lord asked, as if he did not know where they were; for he looks on the ungrateful as if they were unknown to him. How ungrateful most men are to their good God, especially those who have received most benefits from him. But will the God of justice never be tired of our ingratitude, so that he will leave it unpunished until the last day? Is it not punishment enough not to be recognized by Christ? If the thought of that punishment does not affect you, you must know that ingratitude is a vice so hateful to God that he, who is otherwise so merciful, is forced to punish it most severely even in this life. Hence,

How and in what manner does the Almighty punish the ungrateful even in this life?

No upright man upbraids another with the benefits he confers on him. He who acts thus is an intolerable boaster, and makes even his benefits disagreeable to others. He who has received a kindness must certainly be grateful for it, remember it and praise it; but not so he who confers it. Nay, a really good-hearted man tries to make the benefits he confers greater by never speaking of them, and by concealing as far as possible his own part in bestowing them. Such was the conduct of Booz with regard to poor Ruth. She was compelled by want to glean corn in the field; Booz told his reapers not to interfere with her. The best kind of alms are those which are received by the worthy poor without their knowing where they come from, and therefore Christ says: "When thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee" (Matt. 6 : 2-4).

But why do I say this, when my intention was to speak of the punishment of ingratitude? To show that it is the ungrateful alone who compel God to put them to shame by upbraiding them with benefits he so liberally bestows on them, making them see the deformity of their ingratitude, and showing them the justice of the punishment he inflicts on this vice. Thus he said in his anger to the Israelites: "I made you go out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land for which I swore to your fathers; and I promised that I would not make void my covenant with you forever. . . .and you would not hear my voice; why have you done this?" (Judges 2 : 1, 2.) When king David had committed adultery and murder, God sent Nathan to reproach him: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: I

anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee from the hand of Saul, and gave thee thy master's house. Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord to do evil in my sight?" (2 Kings 12 : 7-9.)

1. What an intolerable torment it will be on the last day for the wicked, when in the presence of the whole world the Lord will remind them of all the benefits he bestowed on them, and, to their public shame and confusion, will reproach them for their ingratitude! See, he will say, I have created you out of nothing; I have redeemed you from eternal death by dying on the Cross for you; I have brought you, in preference to many thousand others, to the one true faith; I have enriched you with many gifts of soul and body, and with temporal blessings; I have so often enlightened you by means of my inspirations, and by sermons also, if you had gone to hear them; I have so often overlooked your faults and borne patiently with them, although I could have condemned you to hell for one mortal sin. And yet you have continued to despise me and my law!

Besides this severe reproach, which God often causes the ungrateful to feel in their consciences during life, he punishes them also by withdrawing his benefits from them; for, just as he who is grateful merits a continuance of the benefits hitherto bestowed on him, so the ungrateful man deserves to be deprived of those benefits. Such was the punishment inflicted on the ungrateful Israelites. Such was the punishment of the philosophers of old, of whom St. Paul writes to the Romans that God bestowed on them greater wisdom and understanding than on other men, so that they knew their Creator and penetrated the secrets of nature; "Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God hath manifested it unto them. When they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks," for the wisdom they received from him, and therefore they "became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 19 : 21), as a chastisement for

their ingratitude: "For, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 19 : 22).

2. What punishment has God in store for the ungrateful? He will deprive them of all the blessings he has hitherto conferred on them. He will take from them by death their son, their daughter, their dearest and only child; or else the child who is now the greatest joy of its parents will afterwards be their greatest trouble and torment, because they have trained him up in worldly vanity. He will punish those disobedient children by putting an end to their prosperity; he will deprive them of their father or mother by a premature death, so that, through their inexperience, they will have trouble enough to provide themselves with their daily bread. He will put an end to the joy of that vain woman by depriving her of her husband, or he will punish that man by taking away his wife, so that the happiness they find in the married life will be destroyed. He will make the joy of that strong and healthy man to cease, and send him a long and wasting illness that will make him weary of life. That curious, inquisitive man shall become weak in his understanding, confused in his imagination, and shall pine away in uneasiness and melancholy. He will soon put a stop to the pride and conceit of that wealthy man, and reduce him to poverty.

3. The third chastisement of ingratitude consists in the withdrawal of the blessings that God was prepared to bestow on him had he proved himself grateful for those he had already received, for he is not worthy of future benefits who has not been grateful for those that have been conferred on him in the past. Suppose that a man has made his will in favor of another, but he finds that this other is not at all grateful to him for the favor he intends to confer on him; will he not at once think that his kindness is ill-bestowed, and make another will? I meant well toward him, he will say, but since he shows such ingratitude to me, he shall have nothing from me. In the

same way God told the prophet Samuel to announce to Saul, after the latter had disobeyed his command by beginning the sacrifice: "Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee. And if thou hadst not done thus, the Lord would now have established thy kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Kings 13 : 13). But since thou hast been so ungrateful, he has cast thee away from his sight, and will take thy kingdom from thee: "Thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought him a man according to his own heart; and him hath the Lord commanded to be prince over his people, because thou hast not observed that which the Lord commanded" (1 Kings 13 : 14).

4. The fourth and last punishment of ingratitude, as far as temporal things are concerned, is a premature death, by which God takes the ungrateful man out of the world. Many are of the same opinion as the rich man in the Gospel, who, considering the abundance of his riches, said to himself: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to lay up together my fruits? This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and will build greater....And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer" (Luke 12 : 17-19); enjoy yourself, sleep, play and spend your time in amusements and sensual pleasures. But, unhappy wretches, if you continue in your ingratitude, the day, the hour will come, and perhaps soon, when the unexpected and sorrowful news will be announced to you, as it was to that rich man: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee," although you think you have nothing to do but to enjoy yourself, "and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12 : 22.)

When describing the creation, Moses mentions in order all the creatures that God made by a single word, with the sole exception of fire, of which he says nothing. Did he, perhaps, forget it? By no means. Perhaps God did not create fire?

Is fire, then, such a worthless thing that it does not deserve special mention? On the contrary it is the noblest, most subtle and most powerful of all the elements. Why, then, is there no mention made of it? Because fire is by nature fruitless and ungrateful. God created the heavens with their twinkling stars, and they at once commenced to praise their Creator: "The heavens shew forth the glory of God" (Ps. 18 : 1). He created the earth, and it brings forth countless fruits; the water, and it feeds and nourishes the fishes; the air, and it serves as a habitation for the birds. God created fire also; but what fruit does it bring forth? Not one. Everything that is thrown into it is at once devoured; fuel is the nourishment and support of fire, and the fire destroys its own support. Thus it is a perfect symbol of an ungrateful man, who is supported by the blessings that God bestows on him, but devours them all without producing the least fruit or making the least return for them.

We hear people say sometimes, when a young man dies suddenly or prematurely: What a pity he died so young! How clever and learned he was; what nice manners he had! He would have been a fine man had he lived, and he could have done a great deal of good. Is it not a pity that such rare gifts and talents should be buried so soon? That is true enough; all those talents and endowments were gifts of the divine liberality; but do you know what use that young man made of them? No; that we cannot find out. God could tell us, and if he were pleased to do so, we should perhaps discover that that young man was guilty of the greatest ingratitude toward God, that he misused the talents bestowed on him to indulge in pride, impurity and other vices, and thus to treat his good God with the greatest contempt; so that the divine justice was forced to cry out in anger: Away with that wretch! he is not worthy to be numbered any longer amongst living creatures; his name must be blotted out; go, oh, Death, and hurry him away from the world; he is not worthy to live any longer!

Many Christians, after having been protected by God from many misfortunes, preserved in many dangers of life, and richly endowed with temporal goods, still do not hesitate to offend their sovereign Benefactor by sin. And if God in his anger deprives them of the benefits, the protection, or the blessings and prosperity he has hitherto bestowed on them, or if he refuses any longer to regard them with favor, or takes away their health by a tedious illness, or their life by a sudden and premature death, what else can they think or say but that it serves them quite right; that they are justly deprived of their prosperity, their health, their life? For they are not worthy of anything better, since they have been ungrateful to their sovereign Benefactor. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE SHAMELESSNESS OF THOSE WHO BOAST OF THEIR SINS.

"*The world shall rejoice.*"—John 16 : 20.

The children of God dread nothing more than offending him by a mortal sin; the bare remembrance of their past sins makes them weep and lament. The children of the world have very little fear of sin; they commit it without the least scruple, for the sake of some miserable thing, and they rejoice about it afterwards, as the Holy Scripture says: "They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in the most wicked things" (Prov. 2 : 14). Nay, there are some who go so far as to boast of their sins and exult in them. But

He who rejoices at and boasts of his sins, is the most shameless sinner of all.

A shameless, dishonorable man is the sinner who boasts of

his sins, because he looks upon his disgrace as glorious and honorable. Do you know, oh, sinner! what a shameful, disgraceful thing you have done, if you have ever committed a mortal sin? You have broken the solemn engagement you publicly made with God in the Sacrament of Baptism, and you have wandered far away from your last end, as far, in fact, as the beautiful heaven above is from the terrible hell below. And do you boast of that sin? Like the author whose works were burned by the hangman, you have done a deed that is already condemned by God's justice to eternal fire. Do you make a boast of it? Like the cowardly, runaway soldier, you have thrown down your arms at the first sight of the enemy; that is to say, at the first approach of temptation, that little children drive away with the sign of the Cross; you have yielded; you have deserted your God, and shamefully taken to flight and sold your soul to the devil! Can you make a boast of such cowardice? Like an adulteress and one who has lost her purity, you have allowed yourself to be dishonored and disgraced by the devil. For every soul is either a spouse of Christ, or an adulteress of the devil. By your spiritual adultery you have brought a monster into the world, as David says: "Behold, he hath been in labor with injustice; he hath conceived sorrow, and brought forth iniquity" (Ps. 7 : 15). Do you publicly boast of, and indulge in, such a shameful deed as that? Do you look on it as an honor and glory? Like a malefactor caught in the act, you have been, in presence of God and his Angels, publicly expelled from the society of the elect, and have been banished from your true country; that is, you have lost your right to your heavenly inheritance; your soul has been branded as an accursed child of the devil; you are actually standing on the gallows with the rope around your neck, and if death suddenly overtook you in the state of sin, you would be hurled at once into the abyss of hell. Do you boast of that? Your precious soul, that was formerly in the state of grace,

a child of God, a spouse of God, an heir to the kingdom of heaven, is now lying under the weight of mortal sin, like a slave, stripped and shorn of all its virtues, graces, and merits, loaded with chains and trodden under foot by the devil.

What are your feelings? Are you not overwhelmed with anguish? Must you not struggle fiercely against yourselves before you can make up your minds to declare your sins candidly to the priest? Your limbs tremble, a cold sweat breaks out over you, your tongue can hardly articulate, and it is only by dint of heroically overcoming yourselves that at length you manage to stammer out your sins. And why, in God's name, are you so afraid? It is only to one man that you declare your sins, and he is bound never to speak of them to any one; he is also inclined naturally to the same sins as yourselves, and perhaps he has committed even worse crimes of the same kind as those of which you have accused yourselves; very often he is an utter stranger, who knows nothing whatever about you; in any case, he has a heartfelt compassion for you, is delighted at your repentant confession, and thanks God for the occasion thus presented him of absolving and freeing a sinner and saving a soul from the slavery of the devil. Besides, you make your confession in order to get rid of the disgrace in which you were before God and his Saints. Why, then, are you so much ashamed? Alas, I am ashamed to disclose my own wickedness! Yes, and I know well that it is that very shame which makes many despair to such an extent that they spend ten, twenty, thirty, forty years in the greatest anguish of conscience, multiply unworthy confessions and Communions, and often die impenitent, so that they lose their souls rather than declare a single secret mortal sin, committed in their youth, to the priest who is sitting in the place of God in the tribunal of Penance.

But what do you think of those who are so little sensitive to their own disgrace that they freely and deliberately declare their secret crimes, not in the confessional, that they may be absolved

and saved from hell, but to their companions and associates, and boast of and exult in their wickedness? Nay, what they are sometimes ashamed to tell in confession, they do not hesitate to talk and laugh about with their companions.

There are unfortunately only too many who glory in their sins, and take a delight in publishing them, either by their actions, or by their boasting words. Most worldlings publish their shame by their actions, since they look on it as a disgrace to allow others to surpass them in wickedness and wantonness. They are ashamed of Christian humility and modesty, of piety and devotion, as a mark of simplicity, unbecoming a man of the world. They are ashamed to say grace before and after meals, or to behave reverently in church, before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, in whose presence the Angels tremble. If they go to confession, no one must know of it; if they go to Communion, they do so early in the morning, so that no one may see them. If they perform other good works, they do them secretly, not through humility, like pious souls, who seek to hide their good works from the eyes of men that they may be known to God alone, but through pride, and because they are ashamed to be looked on as pious and devout. We read that our Lord complained of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, who boasted of their fasting by their emaciated countenances, of their alms-deeds by causing them to be trumpeted forth to the world, and of their apparent devotion by putting on an air of piety in the temple: "And all their works they do for to be seen of men" (Matt. 23 : 5). But what will our Lord think, what will he say, on the last day, of the hypocrisy of our modern Christian Pharisees, who conceal their good works that they may not, according to their own perverse imaginations, be put to shame before the world; while by the unlawful customs they conform to, and by their dissipated lives, they give unmistakable proof that they know how to live as children of the world, and do not wish to lead Christian lives?

What else do they do but boast by their actions of their wicked and vicious mode of life?

But many are not satisfied with this alone. They are so shameless that they glory before others of even their secret sins; they boast of getting drunk themselves, and of having made others drunk, or of acts of injustice, saying thus: I made so much money out of that simpleton; if so and so has gained his lawsuit he may thank me for it; if I had not helped him he would not have had the least chance; one must know how to manage such matters. I led that person by the nose until I stripped him of everything. They boast of sacrilegious confessions: I fooled that priest nicely; I made very sure of not letting him into all my secrets. I am afraid of learned people, and do not like to trust myself in their hands. I have a capital confessor, who lets me do as I please; I may come back twenty times with the same old story, and he never refuses me absolution. They boast of abominable sins of impurity, and mention even the persons with whom they sinned. There are even old people who delight to talk before the young and innocent of the excesses of their youth. Nay, many a one boasts of those crimes, although he may not in reality have been guilty of them, simply to satisfy his desire of being looked upon as more ungodly than others.

We find in the Sacred Scripture many examples of people who sinned by vainglory; but how did they sin? The Philistine giant boasted of his bodily strength and stature; Absalom, of his beautiful hair; Sennacherib, of his mighty army; Aman, of his power at court; Antiochus, of the many victories he had gained over his enemies; Nabuchodonosor, of his magnificent palace; Ezechias, of his treasures; the Pharisee in the temple, of his fasting and alms-deeds; Lucifer, of his mighty intelligence and surpassing beauty. All these offended God by their vainglory; but we must acknowledge that they all had something to be proud of. But you, oh, sinners, boast of your sins!

You "are glad when you have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things" (Prov. 2 : 14); you glory in your dishonor: "Your glory is your shame" (Phil. 3 : 19). Therefore you are the most shameless of mortals, and you act more like unreasoning animals than thinking men; for brute beasts may be beaten, slain and burned, but they cannot be made to feel shame. In so far they who boast of their sins are like beasts; "they have committed abomination," the prophet Jeremias might well say of them; "yea, rather they are not confounded with confusion, and they have not known how to blush" (Jer. 8 : 12); they have done abominable things, and they make a boast of them!

"If there be a sin with thee, disclose it not" (Ecclus. 19 : 8). If you have taken revenge on your neighbor; if you have been intoxicated, or have made others so; if you have given away to an impure passion; ah, do not disclose it! keep your guilt to yourself. Why should others know anything about it? If you are not disgusted at the deformity of sin, keep your shame concealed at all events; do not exhibit it openly. Let it suffice for you to be a sinner and a slave of the devil, without proving yourself lost to all sense of shame. If you do not fear the almighty and all-seeing God, who alone knows your secret sins; if you do not fear the eternal fires of hell; if you are resolved on losing your soul; well, carry out your desperate resolution; God leaves you at liberty to do so; but have a little respect for your honor and good name while you are still on earth! How bitterly you complain sometimes of calumniators and detractors, who speak ill of you, either in your presence or in your absence! My honor, you say, is as precious as my life; I cannot allow the least stain to rest on it; I would give the last drop of my blood in defence of my good name. Why, then, should you yourself destroy your good name? Yet that is what you do when you boast of your sins.

If you wish to reveal your sins, go to the sacred tribunal of

Penance, and there, putting aside all shame, disclose them with contrite hearts to the minister of God. If you follow that advice you will be cleansed from the filth of sin, rescued from the slavery of the devil, and be given the liberty, honor, and glory of the children of God, with the certain hope of enjoying honor and glory with the elect in heaven for all eternity. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE HOPELESS STATE OF THOSE WHO BOAST OF THEIR SINS.

"And when he is come he will convince the world of sin." —John 16 : 8.

The sin of which the Holy Ghost will convince the world is the want of faith in Jesus Christ, who, in the Gospel of to-day, expressly says: "Of sin, because they believe not in me." Yet this conviction will be extended to each and every sin, for all sins are due to a want of lively faith, but especially to those sins which are committed against the Holy Ghost, the chief of which is despair on the part of the sinner. But if there is any despairing sinner in the world, it is certainly he who boasts of his sins. He is the most shameless of all sinners, whether he boasts by word, or by act. He is a hopeless sinner, too, as I shall now prove.

I. He who boasts of his sins is a hopeless sinner, as far as he himself is concerned.

II. A hopeless sinner, as far as God is concerned.

That sick man is in a hopeless state who, laboring under a dangerous malady, refuses to follow the advice of the doctor or

of his friends and to take the medicine that might help to cure him, and that because he is firmly persuaded that he is in good health and that there is nothing amiss with him. Nothing short of a miracle can help a man in that state. This is an exact picture of the man who boasts of his sins; he has as many dangerous maladies as he has mortal sins on his conscience; his soul is actually dead, and only awaits the last moment of his life to fall into the everlasting death of hell. For him to have any hope of recovery, of saving his soul by true sorrow and conversion to God, he must heal radically the diseases of his soul by using the medicine appointed for that purpose, and be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance; but that is just where there is no hope for such a sinner. For he cannot do penance and recover the grace of God without acknowledging the wickedness and malice of his sin, and detesting it with all his heart, more than any other evil in the world. It is not enough for him to confess his sins. How many confessions of Christians are but the outward appearance of penance, and mere counterfeits, which add to, instead of taking away, the guilt of sin! That which most frequently interferes with the validity of the Sacrament is the fact that many do not fully acknowledge the malice and deformity of sin, and consequently they do not sincerely repent of and detest it.

The sorrow required for true repentance and conversion is a supernatural act of the will, by which man conceives such a hatred and horror of sin that he execrates and condemns it more than any other evil, more even than the eternal flames of hell, because it offends God, who is infinitely great, infinitely just, and deserving of love for his own sake; and he who is not in such disposition has not a sorrow that will avail to obtain forgiveness for his sins. Now, in the case of those who boast of their sins, where is this horror? "They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things" (Prov. 2 : 14). David watered his couch with his tears every night; he

ate ashes like bread; he mingled his drink with his weeping, as he himself testifies. The public sinner stands humbly at the door of the temple, striking his breast and not daring to raise his eyes to heaven. Peter used to shed bitter tears during the remainder of his life whenever he was reminded of his denial of Christ by hearing a cock crow. Magdalen retired into a cave in the desert and scourged every day severely her body, that was the occasion of the sins she had formerly committed. But those other sinners rejoice when they have done evil, and boast of having offended God as they would of some heroic action; and by that very boasting they commit another mortal sin. What hope is there of such sinners sincerely repenting and saving their souls? I know that as long as a man lives he can change his perverse will; but there is very little hope of that; the great probability is that he will never repent. And this is the reason: "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him" (Pet. 18 : 3). There is hardly any means by which he can be brought to repentance and amendment. You may give him the most salutary warnings: "he contemneth;" speak to him of the omnipresent, almighty God, whom he has so often offended: "he contemneth;" it is long since the thought of God had any power to move him; show him how he has forfeited the joys of heaven for a worthless thing: he cares nothing for his loss; open hell to him, if possible, and let him behold all the fearful torments that await him in that sea of fire: he has no fear of it. And why? Because "he is come into the depth of sins." There you have a true sketch of the sinner who boasts of his sins. And certainly he must be sunk deep in depravity and have lost all feeling through a long-continued habit of sin, who is no longer ashamed of his wickedness. For experience teaches, and every one who has offended God by a grievous sin knows well, that the first, second, third, or fourth sin always inspires one with a secret fear and anxiety. And what a combat

goes on before consent is given to the first mortal sin! That consent is given after a long struggle, but with fear and trembling; and therefore, as our Lord says, "every one that doth evil hateth the light" (Job 3 : 20). He who meditates evil shuns the light; he does not wish to be seen; he hides himself in dark corners; he is afraid almost that the very walls of his room will reproach him. And when he has committed the sin, how ashamed he is of himself! How careful he is to prevent others from coming to a knowledge of his guilt! When David committed adultery with Bethsabee, he was filled with anxiety lest his crime should become known, and he had recourse to all sorts of artifices to conceal it, until at last he commanded the husband of Bethsabee, Urias, a brave soldier who had often exposed his life for him, to be placed in front of the army, so that he might be slain by the enemy. This cruel order was carried out; Urias was killed, and David married Bethsabee; and all that he did solely with the view of concealing his crime from the eyes of men.

Even after he has made some progress in vice and committed many grievous sins, it still takes a long time to deaden the worm of conscience so that its gnawings are not felt. He is filled with fear and despondency when he remembers that he is an enemy of God, a child of perdition; there is no repose nor enjoyment for him even in his sinful pleasures, and it is the greatest torment to him to think of having to declare his sin even to one man in the tribunal of Penance. Even they who have been for some time in the habit of indulging recklessly in sin, and who have as yet no intention of amending, seldom go so far as to wish to be looked on as bad and vicious. The proud man does not like to be thought proud; the avaricious man dreads nothing more than to be called a miser, and tries to palliate his parsimony by saying that it is a necessary economy; anger is called just indignation; hatred, envy and vindictiveness are dignified with the name of lawful resentment; and thus the

vices are clad with the appearance of virtue, that they may be concealed from the eyes of the world. It is the lowest degree of wickedness to wish to appear wicked and to put off all appearance of goodness. And here we have the true character of him who boasts of his sins; he has neither fear nor anxiety on account of them; he glories in publishing them; his delight is to be looked on as impious and ungodly; he does not wish to be thought pious. As far as the sinner is concerned, his salvation appears hopeless.

II. The crime of high treason is committed by one who insults his sovereign, and it is punished by the severest kind of death. If that crime is committed in a sudden fit of passion, and secretly, so that no one is aware of it except the culprit and the sovereign to whom the insult is offered, then perhaps the latter, if he is of a merciful and forgiving disposition, may be induced to listen to the humble prayers and apologies of his guilty subject, and to pardon the offence. But if the culprit is so foolhardy as to boast of the insult he offered to his sovereign, and to make it a subject of laughter among his companions, and actually to seek thereby to foment a rebellion against lawful authority, what would you think of it? Would you say that there is any hope of pardon for such a one?

Sinner, you are guilty of the same crime against the infinite majesty of God when you boast of your sins. You have deliberately deprived yourself of the use of reason by drunkenness, or you have encouraged others to a similar excess; you have vented your wrath on your neighbor, you have had revenge on him who has injured you; you have gratified your impure desires; all these sins are so many insults and acts of contempt toward the infinite majesty of God, that deserve to be punished by hell fire. Another has committed the same sins, but secretly and stealthily, and at first with a feeling of shame and fear at having offended God so grievously, so that he sinned because he was overcome by a violent temptation, and he is

very careful to hide his guilt from the knowledge of men. He has sinned grievously, and deserves hell; but we have a patient, long-suffering and merciful God, who is always ready to receive into his favor the sinner who acknowledges his guilt, and returns to him with a contrite heart, and that favor is easily shown to the secret sinner, because the insult he has offered to God is, so to speak, a hidden and private thing; the divine honor is assailed only by and in presence of one individual, accompanied, perhaps, by the parties of his guilt. But the presumptuous man is not satisfied with that; it is not enough for him to despise and insult his Lord and his God; he must make known to others the insult he had offered God, and boast of it to his companions!

Sinner, you wish to gain honor and glory before men, because you have ventured to offend God and to transgress his law without scruple or shame; to protest before the world that you care nothing for God's commandments, and that you disregard alike his promises and his threats; to show others that you still have a secret pleasure and satisfaction in remembering that you have sinned and offended God; to carry sin about in triumph, as it were, by making your honor and glory before the world consist therein; and to encourage others to be just as unscrupulous as yourself in transgressing the divine law. And what else is that but to treat the Almighty with public disrespect, as if he were unworthy of honor or reverence, to defy him, and, as it were, to say to him: what do I care for thee? What else is it but to make one's self a leader of rebels, and to seek to induce others to revolt against God? What else is it but to take away all shame and dishonor from sin, to make it respectable and becoming, and to set it up on a throne, since you make it the subject of mutual rejoicing and congratulations? Therefore salvation seems hopeless as far as God is concerned.

Be careful to avoid that hopeless state of sin; do not allow

yourselves to become so shameless and so presumptuous as to make a boast and a source of amusement of your sins! If you hear any one dishonoring God by boasting of his sins, sanctify your hand by giving him a good blow on the blasphemous mouth; but if you have not courage or zeal enough for that, interrupt him at least by a gentle warning, and tell him that it is small honor to him to have offended God; or else show by your silence that you do not approve of such talk. In any case, do not allow yourself to be scandalized by it, nor seem to approve of it by laughing at it; nor must your hatred and detestation of sin be a whit less, although you hear others glorifying in their sins. You must feel sorrow for the insult offered the divine honor; say to yourselves with contrite hearts: Oh, God, be merciful to me and all poor sinners; "From my secret sins cleanse me, oh, Lord; and from those of others spare thy servant" (Ps. 18 : 13, 14). Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

FALSE AND USELESS PRAYER.

"*Ask, and you shall receive.*"—John 16 : 24.

Here you have an unlimited permission to request whatever favor you desire with a full assurance of obtaining it. And yet there is nothing more common than to hear men complaining that their prayers seem to be of no avail. What is the cause of that? If ever our hearts and desires are in contradiction with the words we utter, they are so very often when we pray; for we are not always earnest in our prayers, nor do we really wish to be heard; in fact, we desire the very contrary of what we ask for. This is the case especially when we ask for heavenly

graces and spiritual blessings, which ought to be the chief object of our prayers.

Many pray, but they do not wish to receive what they pray for.

He does not pray who does not wish to receive what he prays for, because the nature of prayer consists in the desire of obtaining what we ask for; because asking is but an outward sign of our inward desire. And this was the first condition that our Lord required from the sick and infirm whom he healed. "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5 : 6) he asked the infirm man who had no one to put him in the pond at Bethsaida. "What will ye that I do to you?" (Matt. 20 : 32) he said to the two blind men by the roadside when they cried out to him to have mercy on them. If he had seen that those people were not in earnest in their prayers for health and sight, and that they would have preferred money instead, he would certainly not have healed them. And that is perfectly just; for who would force his gifts and graces on one who is unwilling to receive them, and who sets no store by them? To ask, and not to desire what one asks for, is not to pray, but to deceive and lie. Such is the complaint that Jesus Christ makes of those hypocrites who pray to him with their lips, while their hearts and desires are in utter contradiction with their words: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15 : 7, 8).

Such is the conduct of those who ask for heavenly goods and do not wish to get them. They are not in earnest with a single petition of the Lord's prayer, in which the lips and the heart, the words and the will should always be in perfect accord.

1. They are not in earnest in the first petition: "Hallowed be thy name," the meaning of which is: We wish and desire, with our whole hearts, that the holy name of God be always praised, honored, glorified, and blessed by all creatures in the world, in

a manner befitting his infinite majesty and sanctity; that his glory be every day increased by us and all belonging to us, and by all his creatures; that he be always known and loved by all men, above all things. Now, I ask all who say that prayer: are you really in earnest? Have you a sincere desire to obtain your request? Are you in earnest, if you use irreverently and disrespectfully the most holy Name of Jesus, at which every knee must bend in heaven and in hell; if you utter it in astonishment, or in jest? And you who, by your inveterate and horrible habit of cursing, pay more honor to the name of the devil than to the name of God, and by your bad example teach your children to use a language fit for demons? You who so often speak of God and his Saints in contemptuous, profane, or blasphemous terms? Are you in earnest, I ask, in your prayer that the name of God be hallowed, and his glory increased by all men? Or do you think that you are going the right way about blessing his name? Meanwhile, all these people say every day: "Hallowed be thy name;" but they do not take the least trouble to amend their own conduct. Away with such beggars as those! Either they do not know what they are asking for, or they do not want it.

2. The second petition is, "Thy kingdom come." Do you know what it means? If there was question here of a great and glorious kingdom, such as the two Apostles imagined when their mother asked our Lord: "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom" (Matt. 20 : 21), then, indeed, I should have no doubt of the earnestness of your prayer. Unceasingly you would cry out: Grant, oh, Lord, that thy kingdom may come! It is my most ardent wish! Let me be the first in thy kingdom! I desire with all my heart to sit next to thee! But that is not the meaning of those words, and therefore, although you pray a hundred times a day, "Thy kingdom come," thou, oh, Lord, shalt alone rule in my heart! you cry out far louder with your

hearts, which are already possessed by something else: "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19 : 14). No; the Lord is too severe and he is opposed to our desires; we do not want him to rule over us. Like the wicked Jews, when Pilate showed them Christ, saying, "Behold your King!" they cried out: "We have no king but Cæsar" (John 19 : 14, 15). Thus many Christians really cry out when they pray: We have no king but our unmortified flesh, whose desires we always are willing to gratify; we have no ruler but that person to whom we have sold our heart, our love and our freedom, and whom we adore as an idol; we will have no master but the world, whose laws we observe most obediently; no lord but the devil, whose slaves we make ourselves by sin. Again, how few Christians there are who pray earnestly for the eternal kingdom of heaven! If the Lord were to come and knock at their door while they are praying over and over again, "Thy kingdom come," oh, what troubled countenances there would be! with what fear and dread they would cry out: Give us till tomorrow! Wait a little, oh, Lord; we have had no time to prepare! Give me a few years longer; I am not so old yet! There are many who, if the choice were given them between heaven and earth, between eternal joys and the allurements of the world and the delights of the flesh, would cry out at once, in the words of the psalmist: "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's; but the earth he hath given to the children of men" (Ps. 113 : 16), therefore I prefer to remain on earth amongst men. Oh, you may pray as much as you like, "Thy kingdom come," you will not be one bit better, for you are not in earnest; you do not want it.

3. The third petition is: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." What a beautiful and angelic prayer that is! Are you all in earnest about it? If so, you are not in need of any more virtue; you are all perfect and holy. In earnest, indeed! A likely thing, to be sure! you poor, oppressed and needy

Christians! See how this prayer of yours, "Thy will be done," chimes in with your actions! God has been pleased to place one man in humble and reduced circumstances; another he has deprived of honor and respectability before the world; a third he has commanded to work hard for daily bread; a fourth he visits with sickness or bodily pain, or with temporal losses, or with different crosses and trials; the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, must look on while the object of their dearest affection lies dangerously ill, and may die at any moment. All these people say, "Thy will be done;" but how do they say it? What a want of resignation they show! What tears they shed! How impatient they are! How they murmur and complain! They almost give way to despair. It is natural to weep and be afflicted at misfortune, nor can we help feeling pain and grief; that is the reason why God sends us crosses; we must feel them; we must weep and be afflicted; but our sorrow should not interfere with patience and resignation to the will of God. Job certainly felt his sufferings when he was lying on the dunghill; he cried out: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me" (Job 19 : 21). And yet he was patient in the highest degree, and was quite satisfied with the punishment inflicted on him by God; for he said: "Blessed be the name of the Lord." David wept bitterly when he heard of the death of his son Absalom: "My son Absalom, Absalom, my son," said he; "would God that I might die for thee" (Job 1 : 21); but at the same time he praised God with the most humble submission to his will. Jesus Christ himself was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane at the thought of the sufferings that were in store for him, and he was sorrowful even to death. He even asked his heavenly father to free him from such a shameful death, saying: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me;" but at once, with the utmost resignation, he added: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26 : 38, 39). So that sorrow

is not a sign of dissatisfaction and discontent when he who suffers it says and thinks: Oh, Lord, it is thy will for me to suffer; thy will be done!

4. If we are to be earnest about any petition we surely should be so about the fourth: "Give us this day our daily bread." I do not think that any one would refuse to pray earnestly for this, or to stretch out both hands eagerly to seize hold of any blessings of the kind that are bestowed on him; in fact, the more one receives of those blessings the better he is pleased. Still, surprising as it is, even in this petition we are not always in earnest. And why? Consider what we ask for—"bread,"—that is, whatever is necessary to support life, but nothing superfluous. According to the well-known exhortation of St. Paul: "Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content" (1 Tim. 6 : 8); nor should we desire any more: "For they that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. 6 : 9). Give us "our daily bread;" that is to say, our neighbor must share with us, and he to whom God has given much must help the poor and needy. Give us our "daily bread," by which we acknowledge our constant and humble dependence on God, and, like poor beggars, expect our food from his hands. Give us "this day;" we do not say to-morrow, so as not to show too great an anxiety for the future, and to prove our confidence in the common Father of all, who feeds the birds of the air and the worms of the earth.

From this you can see what your desire is regarding this petition. Judge yourselves if they are satisfied with their daily bread who squander away their lives in immoderate pleasures, and indulge in too great an extravagance in dress. They are not content with their bread, although there are so many poor who have no bread whom they could and should help out of their superfluous wealth. Do they ask for "our" daily bread

who are concerned for themselves alone, and do not trouble themselves about others, while they look upon the law of almsgiving as not binding in conscience, and very often resort to all kinds of tricks to plunder poor widows and orphans? Are they content with their daily bread for "this day" who, through greed of gold, are most anxious to save all they can, and to increase their treasures, as if they expected never to die, but to live in this world for ever? All these people do not really desire what they ask for; they are not satisfied with that for which they pray to God.

5. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"—that is, as we deal with our neighbor, with him who has offended and injured us, and who says he is our sworn enemy; so, also, oh, Lord, do we wish and desire that thou shouldst deal with us, and with our sins! Oh, vindictive man! do you mean that? You cannot bear the man who has injured you, or with whom you have a difference or a lawsuit; you do not speak a friendly word to him; your heart is full of bitterness toward him; you will never forget the harm he has done you; if you wish him no harm, neither do you wish well to him; you eagerly avail yourself of every opportunity of paying him off in his own coin. Now, do you really wish and desire that God should deal with you in the same way, and take vengeance on you for the sins you have committed against him? Do you really mean that? Then woe to you if he were to do as you ask! And yet you say every day to him: "forgive us, as we forgive!" No; I cannot believe that you really wish to be heard; and so you do not desire what you pray for.

6. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"—that is, keep off from us, oh, Lord, the evil spirit, that he may not deceive us by his wiles, temptations and suggestions; keep down in us the unruly desires of the flesh, that we may not be led by them to transgress thy law; keep our souls from all dangerous occasions, and "deliver us from evil," and especially

from the greatest of all evils, sin! Such is the tenor of our prayer; but what is really our wish and desire? Truly, the devil is not always to blame for every temptation and sin! Much less is God an occasion of evil to us. He permits us to be tempted, but not more than we can bear; and his only object in doing so is to prove our virtue, and to increase our merit and eternal glory. But very often we tempt ourselves and do our best to lead ourselves into evil; we go without necessity into the dangerous occasions of sin; we give full liberty to our eyes, ears, tongue and all our senses; we are fond of, and seek conversations, friendships and acquaintances that the holiest and most mortified servants of God shunned through fear of falling, and which we must acknowledge in conscience to be dangerous to innocence; we read books, novels and love tales, and think about what we read, until it would be a miracle indeed if we did not give way to our evil desires. And still we pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation!" Truly there is no earnestness in our prayer!

Will God, who "is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1 John 3 : 20), not only the words we speak, but also the desires of our hearts, listen with favor to a prayer which our own conscience tells us to be false and deceitful? Yes, he says; I will grant the prayer of your heart, but not that of your lips! You speak of the salvation of your soul, and the kingdom of heaven; but in reality you desire eternal ruin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt!" You say with the lips to me: "Thy will be done," but you are not satisfied with my will; "be it done to thee as thou wilt;" remain in your impatience and discontent. You say that I must forgive you your trespasses as you forgive those of others against you; but you refuse to forgive; I will do the same. You ask me to free you from danger of sin; but you run wilfully into the danger; go on, then, to your own destruction. You say that I must convert you; but you remain in the state of mortal sin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt." Amen!

so be it! You will live and die in sin, and perish eternally! And why? Because such is your will. Alas, what a fearful Amen that is! God grant that it may never be said to any of our prayers!

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE DEPRAVITY OF CURSING.

"*These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.*"—John 16 : 20.

There is no doubt that there are many Christians who do not really wish that their prayers should be heard. Would to God that this were the greatest fault! For what a shameful, hellish kind of prayer is in daily use even amongst those Catholics who have their mouths filled with imprecations and seek to draw the divine malediction down on earth. To-day I must speak of that abominable language, which is unfortunately so common among all classes of people, and is such a fruitful source of scandal; so that they who are still free from this vice may not be influenced by the bad example of others, and that they who are addicted to this bad habit may at once correct it. For

I. Cursing and swearing are a foolish and a hellish kind of language, highly unbecoming a Catholic; and

II. Of all wicked language, it is that which gives the most scandal.

I. By the language that a man speaks we generally know what country he belongs to; if we hear a stranger speak Spanish and nothing else, we conclude that he is a Spaniard; if he speaks nothing but Italian, we know that he is a native of Italy;

if he speaks French, we know at once that he is a Frenchman. When Peter was in the hall of Caiphas the high-priest, in spite of all his protestations to the contrary he was at once known to be a disciple of Christ, and was convicted of a lie; for the servant said to him: "Even thy speech doth discover thee" (Matt. 26 : 73), and betrays thee at once as a Galilean.

Now, you can draw the conclusion yourselves. If you wish to know what country many Catholics belong to, you have only to notice the language they speak; from that you will find out where they come from, where they were born and bred, and what country they belong to; whether they belong to the land of the Angels above, or to that of the demons below; to heaven, or to hell.

What sort of a language do the wicked speak in hell? They howl like dogs in their rage; they gnash their teeth with anger; they curse the hour of their birth; they curse their fathers and mothers, the God who created them, the devils who torture them, and the companions of their misery, with whom they must live in eternal hatred and enmity. Such is the language of hell, and it consists of nothing but curses, imprecations, and blasphemy. Therefore, at the last judgment the reprobate will receive from Jesus Christ, when he is passing sentence on them, no other title but that of accursed: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!" there you can curse as much as you will.

The demons themselves approve of that hellish kind of language; these are our pupils, they say; they have acquired as great skill in speaking as the reprobate do in hell; so that, if we were even to forget our own language, we might learn it from them when they come to us; we are always ready to dance to music of that kind. The devil was once seen sitting at the open window of a house, holding in one hand a long sheet of paper full of notes, while with the other he kept on beating time like the leader of an orchestra, laughing all the while and show-

ing signs of extraordinary joy, and crying out: "Well done! bravo! go on!" What was going on in the house? There were four people living in it who were adepts in cursing, the husband and wife, the son and the mother-in-law. There was nothing to be heard from them from morning till night but oaths and imprecations. They had just begun breakfast, and because the son was too greedy and had taken too much on his plate, the mother cried out to him: "May the first bite you eat choke you!" The father followed suit, saying, "Plague take you!" and last of all came the mother-in-law, who wished that he would swallow a thousand devils. This was the music that so delighted the evil spirit that he could not help expressing his joy, and doubtless he considered that he had secured four skilled musicians for his hellish orchestra, which always played tunes of that kind. Alas! how many Christian houses there are in which, if we could see the devil in visible form, we should find him exulting with joy at the cursing and swearing that are continually to be heard therein!

How disgraceful for a reasoning being, a Catholic, a brother and member of Jesus Christ, redeemed by the precious blood of the meek Lamb, and an adopted child of God, to accustom himself to the use of such hellish language, to speak as the damned do; to make himself the comrade of devils, and to bear about the evil spirit constantly in his heart, in his mouth, and on his tongue! Is that, then, the end that we are to work for, although God has created us for the sole purpose of praising, blessing, honoring, and loving him? Is that the wish that we daily send forth to God in heaven when we say the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be thy name"? Does that diabolical language harmonize with the solemn promise we made to God in Baptism as Catholics, to renounce forever the devil and all his works, and to devote ourselves, body and soul, and tongue especially, to the praises of God? The first member of the body that God takes possession of in Baptism is the tongue, for when

a child is brought to the church to be baptized, the priest does not at once pour the water on its head; no, he first places the blessed salt on its tongue, to show that he whose name is enrolled among the servants and followers of Christ must use his tongue only to praise God, and to promote the divine glory.

Catholics, what do you mean by using such abominable language? Are you so very anxious to belong to the reprobate, even before your time comes to join them? Are you firmly resolved on going to hell? Then wait, at all events, until you die. You will then be able to swear and curse and blaspheme for all eternity, and will not that satisfy you? Why, then, should you be so anxious to anticipate in this life the miserable state of eternal damnation? What is most to be deplored in this evil habit of cursing and swearing is that it is increasing daily, and infecting souls that were hitherto innocent. Therefore I say:

II. This vice gives more scandal than any other sin of the tongue. In the strict sense of the word that language is called scandalous which gives or can give others an occasion of sin. Although there are other sins of the tongue which are far worse and more sinful in themselves, yet there are none which give more occasion to evil than the sins of cursing and swearing. The young learn it from the old, and that without shame or scruple, and without any one being astonished, much less shocked at it. Wherever you go, from morning till night, you may hear horrible imprecations. So common is it that people are ashamed of it no longer, and it is considered as something to be proud of when one is a master in the art of cursing. Even little children, almost before they are able to speak plainly enough to ask for a piece of bread and butter, and certainly before they know how to make the sign of the Cross, or to say the "Our Father," sometimes know how to curse and swear, and, when they get into a passion, to call down all sorts of imprecations on those who vex them. Pliny writes that a child

was once born in Rome with all its teeth perfect, and that the people were thunderstruck at this prodigy and looked on it as a bad omen. But what was there to wonder at? Nowadays enough children of that kind come into the world who have sharp teeth on their lips and tongues even before they have the full number of teeth in their upper and lower jaws, and who know how to curse long before they have learned their prayers. They curse their own parents, or at least give vent to their anger against them by secret murmurs and ill wishes. But, after all, that is not surprising; the poor children hear nothing else at home. Their fathers curse, their mothers curse, their brothers and sisters, and servants, and neighbors curse; in a word, they hear nothing else. What, then, can the poor little ones do but talk as they hear others about them talking the whole day long? If my father and mother speak that way, they think, and my brothers and sisters, and every one else in the house, there can be no great harm in it. So those young lambs follow the rest of the flock without shame or scruple, firmly believing that they are doing right.

Therefore, woe to those who curse, on account of the scandal they give! So general is the scandal given by wicked and profane tongues that this vice is no longer looked on as shameful, and is left as a legacy to one's children and children's children, and is thus handed down to posterity. With reason does David compare such foul-mouthed people to open sepulchres, from which an effluvium arises that poisons the atmosphere around. "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they acted deceitfully; the poison of asps is under their lips." And of whom does he says this? Of those whose "mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Ps. 13 : 3). But woe to the "man by whom scandal cometh!" A twofold woe to him who by his profane tongue helps to introduce and spread the scandal in a community! For if in the judgments of men he is looked on as an incendiary, who, by not watching his own fire

carefully, is the cause of a widespread conflagration; how will it be with him who is caught in the act of setting fire to other people's property? But that is what those foul-mouthed people do every day. They are not satisfied with uttering curses themselves; they must teach innocent souls to follow their example, and thus they spread the inextinguishable fire of a bad habit, not only in their own families, but in the whole neighborhood. Woe to them when their angry Judge will call them to account and inflict vengeance on them for the souls they have stolen from him and made the prey of hell!

And woe to you, parents, fathers and mothers, who are given to cursing and swearing! Every time you make use of such bad language you commit not merely one sin, but as many sins as there are children or servants listening to you, who thus learn from you to speak in the same hellish manner. Ah, parents, woe to you, I say again, whether you are in earnest or not with your curses and imprecations! You should, at all events, remember that you are the occasion of much sin to others. Think of this, and think of it often; this one consideration alone, of the harm you do those under your care, should make your hair stand on end with horror. Poor, unfortunate children, how I pity them when they are taught such lessons by their own parents; when those who have given them temporal life deliver them over to eternal death! God has entrusted them to you as his own beloved children by adoption, and he has laid on you the strict obligation of bringing them up with the greatest care for his honor and glory; of teaching them how to know, praise, and bless God; but you teach them to curse and swear. God has entrusted children to you, that by your teaching and good example you may bring them up to dwell in the land of the Angels in heaven, there to praise and bless their Creator forever; but you prepare them from their very cradles to become companions of demons in the land of lost souls, where they will curse and blaspheme their Creator forever. You

teach them the language of hell, even before they are sent thither. What a fearful account you will have to render! It were better for you to have a millstone tied round your neck, and to be sunk into the depths of the sea.

An eternal malediction is in store for those who have the habit of cursing: "He loved cursing, and it shall come to him" (Ps. 108 : 18). He need not trouble himself about it; what he loves shall fall to his lot, when that terrible Voice shall thunder forth in the valley of Josaphat: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25 : 41); that is, for those who take sides with the devil during their lives. Then will he look for a blessing, but will not find one for all eternity: "He would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him" (Ps. 108 : 18).

PENTECOST SUNDAY.

THE MALICE OF CURSING.

"*We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.*"—Acts 2 : 11.

On this day the Apostles, who were hitherto afraid to open their mouths, begin all at once to speak in divers tongues. What is this? cried out the Jews and heathens in astonishment. Are not those who are speaking all Galileans? And yet each one of us hears them speak the language of our own countries. The Apostles used to speak in a far different style; our Lord had to bear with their murmurs and complaints, their quarrels and strifes as to who was the greatest among them. Nay, they even lent their tongues to the demon of cursing when they asked our Lord that fire should be sent down from heaven

to consume the city that had refused to receive them: "Lord," they said to him, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9 : 54.) Peter had even sworn that he knew not our Lord: "he began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man" (Matt. 26 : 74). But now all of a sudden we hear nothing from them but the praises and wonderful works of God. And what wonder was it, after all? They were filled with the fire of divine love, and they could not speak but as the Holy Ghost inspired them. How many different kinds of speech may we not hear nowadays, which are inspired not by the Holy Ghost, but by the spirit of evil! I am alluding to that wicked language of cursing and swearing on the least provocation. It is not a trifling vice, for

I. Cursing is a sin, and in itself a mortal sin.

II. It is a mortal, and, at the same time, a most injurious sin.

I. Cursing is a sin, in spite of the fact that many think little of it. "Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12 : 14), says the Apostle, and again: "Do not err" (be sure you do not deceive yourselves on this point); "neither idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers shall possess the kingdom of God." From these words it is evident that cursing in itself is a mortal sin; for it is reckoned amongst those sins which exclude from heaven.

1. It offers a grievous insult to God. If we consider the insult offered to God by cursing, and the harm it does Christian charity, who will dare to say that it is only a venial sin? Hear, oh, profane man! you wish, through anger and displeasure against your domestics, through envy against your neighbor, through hatred and vindictiveness against your enemy, that he should break his neck, or die suddenly, or be struck by lightning, or be possessed or carried off by the devil; you know

better than I what your favorite curses are; but do you know what guilt you incur thereby in the sight of God? You arrogate to yourself the office of judge, which belongs to him alone; for you pass sentence on your fellow-man, and desire that the evil you mention should befall him. But this is not the worst, although it is bad enough. What office do you then leave to your God? You make the Lord God your executioner, who is to carry out the sentence you have pronounced, and to inflict on your neighbor the punishment you have invoked on him, because you are unable to inflict it yourself. What an insult to the great God! what presumption on the part of a miserable mortal! And yet you imagine that cursing is only a small fault! You have been guilty of it times without number, perhaps from the moment you were first able to speak, and you have felt neither shame nor scruple on account of it; you are still guilty of it every day, when things do not go according to your wish. Do you think it a small sin to act thus insolently toward the Almighty, and to transgress so flagrantly the first and most important commandment, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart"?

2. Cursing is grievously injurious to fraternal charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This love you violate, and grievously, when you curse your neighbor and wish that some great misfortune, such as sudden death, or being carried off by the devil, should befall him. If merely to rejoice in secret at your neighbor's grievous misfortune, the mere wish that some serious calamity should happen your greatest enemy, is a grievous sin against the charity we owe all men, how can it be a lesser sin to say openly to your neighbor that you desire that the evils you wish him in your angry and vindictive heart should really come upon him?

3. It is not even lawful to curse the devil. Because, just as the malefactor must not curse the executioner who stands with drawn sword ready to cut his head off, inasmuch as the latter

acts by the authority of the judge and fulfils the sentence pronounced by the justice of man, so it is not lawful to curse the devil, who sometimes, by divine permission and arrangement, punishes men on earth, and who tortures the wicked in hell as the executioner of the divine justice.

4. How much more unlawful, then, to curse a human being! If it is not lawful to curse even the devil, who is the cause of so much evil in the world, and who seeks to ruin our souls eternally, then it is still less lawful to curse the earth, or the work we have to do, or the dumb beasts we make use of, because these things are harmless creatures of God, and cannot do us any injury, since they have not reason. What a terrible sin it must then be to curse a reasoning being like ourselves, who has been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who is a Christian, a brother of Christ, an adopted child of God, and an heir to the kingdom of heaven, and whom we are bound to love as ourselves! What a terrible sin it must be to call down imprecations on one's own domestics and children, on one's wife or husband, and, most terrible of all, on one's own father or mother! What a fearful sin it is, I say, no matter what annoyance they may cause us! For, wicked as a human being may be, still he is not a devil; he still has a claim to, and a hope of, heaven. No, I repeat, in the words of St. Paul, "do not err;" do not deceive yourselves, nor flatter yourselves with the belief that cursing is only a small matter; "railers shall not possess the kingdom of God." Therefore it is manifest that a wilful, deliberate, and grievous imprecation is a mortal sin. And it is equally manifest that it is a most injurious sin.

II. The habit of cursing, which is so common, is injurious to him who is guilty of it, to him against whom the curses are uttered, and even to the whole community in which such a wicked habit prevails.

1. He who curses deliberately forfeits his right to heaven and

condemns himself to hell. Is not that harm enough? Yet it is an effect common to every mortal sin, although not produced in the same way. In some respects those who are addicted to other sins and vices have more to excuse them than those who are given to cursing. And why? Because they have, at least in imagination and in outward appearances, some profit and advantages from their sin; they have the money they desire, or the sensual gratification, or the honor, or the satisfaction they seek for. When they are burning in the flames of hell they can at least look back on their lives and assign the cause of the torments they are suffering. They know for what they sinned and deserved hell; they have, as the saying is, something for their money. Such was the answer that Abraham gave to the rich glutton when the latter cried out to him: "Have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." "Son," was Abraham's reply to him, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16 : 24, 25).

But you, who sin so often every day by curses and imprecations, what will you have to say for yourselves in hell fire, except that you have sinned, and nothing more? For what profit, or pleasure, or honor, do you gain by cursing? None at all. Like mad dogs, you attack your fellow-men in your anger, and thereby poison your own blood, and fill your entrails with bitter gall. This is the pleasure, the joy, the delight you find in cursing; and what have you gained by it? Is your pain or your trial lessened by your wicked language, or have you been relieved from the pressure of misfortune? Your sufferings are just the same as before; you have the same trials, the same calamities to bear. Nay, they are worse than before; because those whom you have cursed in your anger have answered you in the same wicked strain, and thus increased your

bitterness. This is the profit, this the advantage you have gained!

2. Besides the great injury you do yourselves, there is also that which you inflict on those you curse. We read the command given by God: "Thou shalt not speak evil of the deaf" (Levit. 19 : 14); that is, thou shalt not curse them. Why did God publish a special law in their favor? They cannot even hear the curse, nor know whether they are praised or abused. It can do a deaf man no harm to curse him; why, then, has God expressly forbidden it? We must understand this command in a moral sense; you must not curse any creature that has neither sense nor reason; and, when things do not go as you wish, you must not give vent to your ill-feeling by cursing your work, the weather, or your dog, your ox, or your horse, because they do you no harm; they are not to blame for causing you annoyance. They are deaf creatures, and do not understand, so that when you curse them you ill-treat and do them wrong.

Again, by the deaf are understood those who resemble people who are devoid of hearing, such as little children, and those who are morally deaf, such as disobedient sons and daughters, and others who refuse to listen to good advice. There are parents who curse their little infants when they are restless at night. How foolish they are in doing so! They are deaf creatures, and cannot understand what is said to them. All men, no matter who they are, are deaf as far as cursing is concerned, for they pay little attention to it, and look on it as a blank cartridge, that merely makes a noise, but cannot hurt them. No matter; the curse may have a bad effect on them, and injure them, for we read: "Give not to them that ask of thee room to curse thee behind thy back," to wish evil to thee, even in thy absence! "For the prayer of him that curseth thee in the bitterness of his soul shall be heard; for he that made him will hear him" (Eccles. 4 : 56). Thus you see that, although

the evil wishes of him who curses his neighbor are not able to bring down misfortune or calamity upon him at once, yet very often God hears the curse and allows the misfortune to befall the person cursed, in order to show how he abhors that hellish language, and how he wishes to deter all men from the use of it.

The curses of parents against their own children have received from God a special efficacy, as we read: "The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children, but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation" (Eccles. 3 : 11). God allows that, in order to confirm and ratify the authority of parents, whom he has placed as his viceroys over their children, to inflict on the children the punishment they deserve for having provoked their parents to anger by obstinacy, disobedience and want of filial love, and also to punish the parents themselves by the grief and affliction they feel at seeing that their curses are not without effect. If we were able to trace those effects, and to point to the evils and misfortunes that the curses of parents bring down on their children, we should behold many a sad and lamentable sight.

I know well the empty excuse that people bring forward to try to lessen their guilt: I have no bad meaning in what I say; I curse only to frighten others; I do not think of what I am saying when I am in a passion; I curse only through habit, and I am sorry for it afterwards, and so on. But all these lame excuses have nothing to do with the matter; much less do they make cursing lawful or innocent. "Bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12 : 14). Once for all, give up that shameful, scandalous, diabolical, and most injurious habit; and determine to avoid, and to repent of, that sin which brings neither profit nor pleasure, and is the cause of great harm. If you are bent on losing your souls, at all events do not lose them for the sake of such a wretched and profitless vice. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

THE NECESSITY OF CORRECTING THE HABIT OF CURSING.

"Teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."—Matth. 28 : 19.

All the apostolic functions of the Church must begin in the name of the Blessed Trinity. All the Sacraments are administered in the name of the Blessed Trinity. The same name is invoked at the beginning of the Mass, and at the beginning of a sermon. All Christians make the sign of the Cross in this name when they pray. But how perverse the Christian world is in this respect nowadays! For once that we hear the name of God we hear that of the devil twenty, a hundred times. There are many Christians of whom we have good reason to believe that they begin and end all their actions in the name of the devil, so accustomed are they to make use of curses and imprecations. Yet they who are addicted to this habit bring forward all kinds of excuses in order to show that cursing is either harmless, or that, at all events, it is only a small fault; or that, through long continued habit, it is impossible to correct it. But

I. The habit of cursing must be corrected; no excuse to the contrary is of any avail.

II. It can be corrected, for there are means enough of correcting it.

I. It is a common thing for people to try to excuse and palliate sins. To excuse our misdeeds, and to try to make ourselves appear innocent, is an art in which we are all skilled, and

which we have inherited from our first parents. "Where art thou?" (Gen. 3 : 9) said the Lord to Adam, after he had eaten the forbidden fruit and incurred the punishment of death. How didst thou dare to touch that tree? Didst thou not know that it was forbidden thee to eat of its fruit, under pain of eternal damnation? Adam answered: I could not help it; "the woman thou gavest to me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3 : 12). Thou, then, oh, woman, art the cause of the transgression. "Why hast thou done this?" But, she answered, I am not to blame; "the serpent deceived me, and I did eat" (Gen. 3 : 13). If the serpent had been allowed to speak there is no doubt that he would have made a still more plausible excuse. That is the way in which the children of Adam and Eve still try to excuse nearly all their faults. We always try to shirk the blame, and therefore it is very difficult for us to be cured, because we do not know that we are ailing, and the evil from which we suffer is not outside, but inside of us.

1. This is the great mistake made by those who are given to cursing and swearing. It is not my fault, they say; I cannot help cursing; my household affairs, my neighbors, the people with whom I have to deal, they are to blame for it. That surly and drunken man, that idle, talkative woman, that ill-reared son, that disobedient daughter, who causes me such annoyance, that troublesome neighbor, who is such a torment to me; these are the people who drive me to curse and swear; in fact, I cannot get on without it. It is not true; your excuse is not worth anything; it cannot hide your wickedness. You should strike your own breast and say, "through my fault, through my most grievous fault!" The only cause of the wicked language you use is your impatience, which prevents you from bearing the least contradiction; your pride and obstinacy, which make you insist on having the last word; your angry and revengeful disposition, which is aroused at the least opposition; your envious

heart, which is filled with bitterness at anything that displeases you in the least. The evil from which you suffer is not outside, but inside of you.

2. It is true, say others, that I am to blame; but God forbid that I should be guilty of a mortal sin by cursing! I do not mean what I say. Sometimes, through anger or impatience, I say: May the devil take you! may you be struck dead on the spot! but I do not really wish that evil should happen the person to whom I am speaking. I talk in that way only to frighten my children when they are disobedient, or to let others who annoy me see that they must amend their behavior toward me. You maintain that you are not in earnest, and that you do not mean what you say when you curse; but who can believe that, especially when, as you admit, you curse your neighbor through anger and impatience. Your limbs tremble with passion, anger is written on your forehead and appears in your countenance, while a volley of imprecations proceeds from your mouth. Who can believe that you are not in earnest? No, my good friend, your excuse is worth nothing.

But whether you mean it or not, is it lawful for you to use such scandalous and hellish language? And do you think that the proper way to correct your children is to curse and swear at them? Did you ever find that it did them any good? The fact is, they pay very little attention to it, for they are too much accustomed to it from you. You put up a straw figure in the field as a scarecrow to frighten the birds away and prevent them from eating the seed you have just planted; for a few days the birds will be afraid of it; but when they see that it cannot move from the place in which you have put it, they lose all fear, and when they have eaten their fill they actually come to roost on the straw figure itself. No, your cursing will do your children no good; it will only make them more obstinate, disobedient and wicked; for they will think to themselves: if my parents are so godless as to curse and swear in that way, I am not

bound to have any respect for them. There are certainly means enough to correct the faults of your children in a Christian manner, without having recourse to such a detestable means as that, which only makes them worse.

3. In most cases, say others, I curse and swear through inadvertence and habit, because I have been so long accustomed to it; or else the curse escapes me when I am in a passion, and I am afterwards sorry for it. But to curse through habit without making serious efforts to amend, and to continue in that habit, makes the sin greater, more deserving of punishment, and less excusable. If you were to utter an imprecation now and then, inadvertently, it would not be so bad; but when you bring forward the force of habit as an excuse, you betray yourself and manifest your guilt to its full extent.

4. I curse, another says, but it is nearly always in the heat of passion. And are you blameless therefore? But when the anger and the cursing it gives rise to are habitual, you will never persuade a sensible man that you do not advert to what you say. You are bound to control your anger. "Be ye angry and sin not!" (Ps. 4 : 5) is the command that God has given.

5. No sooner has the curse escaped my lips, than I am sorry for it at once. That is quite right; still you have wished evil to your neighbor. I am sorry from my heart for all the sins I have committed; but unfortunately they have been committed all the same. Certainly, by a supernatural sorrow and repentance I can wash out my guilt and obtain pardon of my sins in the sight of the good and merciful God; yet I can never get rid of the fact that I have committed them. The same sorrow is to be found, with regard to any other vice, in all those who still have a conscience and who wish to save their souls; when their anger is over, their passion cooled down, their desire for revenge satisfied, and their wicked passions gratified, then they are sorry for what they have done; yet there is no doubt that they have committed sin by yielding to their evil inclinations.

You have killed a man, and you are very sorry for what you have done when you see his dead body lying at your feet; are you therefore not guilty of murder? Therefore, Christians, do not seek to excuse yourselves, or to palliate that abominable habit of cursing and swearing by such frivolous pretexts! You should rather devote all your efforts to using the proper means to get rid of that habit. It is clear that cursing cannot be excused from sin, that the habit of it must be amended, and that there is an obligation to that effect under pain of sin. But how am I to do that? some will say; I have become so accustomed to cursing that I cannot give it up now. Still you can do it, if you go the right way about it.

II. There is no doubt that it is a very difficult thing to give up at once a bad habit that one has been accustomed to for a long time; for it becomes a second nature, and offers a kind of violence to the reason and the will. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil" (Jer. 13 : 23). This is the worst punishment that God inflicts on the hardened sinner, namely, to allow him to become so obdurate that he despairs of being able to amend. And that punishment is inflicted especially on those who are given to cursing: "He loved cursing and it shall come unto him" (Ps. 108 : 18). I call as witnesses of the truth of this you who are given to this wicked habit. Have you found any improvement in yourselves in this respect for years past? You cursed yesterday, you will curse to-day. For the last two, four, six, ten years, or longer, you have been in the habit of cursing, and you are as bad this year as ever you were. You have confessed it hundreds of times, but there is no sign of improvement yet; you will confess it again, and I am afraid you will be no better. Each time, you will say, I have cursed I am sorry for it; I will never do it again; but all to no purpose.

But no matter how difficult it is to give up a bad habit of long

standing, yet it is not impossible; otherwise you would not commit sin by continuing to curse, because God does not require impossibilities from us. You must bridle that slippery member; you must do violence to it, and use the proper means, and you will, with God's help, get the better of your bad habit.

1. The first means is the fear of God. If there were a law that every one who curses must put a dollar in the poor-box, would it be impossible for you then to give up the habit of cursing? Not at all; and, indeed, a fine of a dime would be enough to induce you to conquer it immediately. And what punishment has God threatened to inflict on those who violate the command not to curse? Perhaps a fine of a dollar? Ah, listen to the words of the Apostle: "Railers shall not possess the kingdom of God;" they will be condemned to hell for all eternity. Oh, you who are addicted to this evil habit, what are you thinking of? The dread of being fined by an earthly superior is enough to put you on your guard, to restrain your tongue, and to cure your wicked propensity; but the fear of offending God, who threatens you with the loss of heaven and the eternal pains of hell if you disobey him, is not able to make you give up the habit of cursing! But you do not think of such things, and therefore you continue in your wicked ways, without any attempt to amend.

2. The second means is prayer. Of Jesus Christ, when he healed the dumb man, we read: "Taking him from the multitude apart," and looking up to heaven, he groaned, and said to him: Ephpheta, which is: be thou opened; and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right" (Mark 7 : 33, 35). If you are in earnest to curb your wicked tongues, and to speak right in future, lift up your eyes to heaven, and let your humble sighs and prayers ascend to the throne of God; for it is from him that you must seek the help that you would in vain look for elsewhere. If, according to St. James, no man can tame his tongue, what are we to do? There is One in heaven who

can tame it; to him we must go for help, and beg of him to keep our tongues in check. If you wish, then, instead of a cursing tongue, to have one inflamed with the fire of love, you must resolve every morning to avoid cursing during the day; and since you know how weak you are, and how powerless to amend your bad habit, you must with childlike confidence beg of God to help you and to free you from it.

3. The third means is co-operation with God's grace. Besides praying, you must co-operate with the grace of God. Here again we can learn from what our Lord did, when he healed the dumb man: "He put his fingers into his ears, and, spitting, he touched his tongue, and said to him, ephpheta, which is, be thou opened." Oh, if all who are addicted to this evil habit would frequently command their tongues sternly and sharply, and enforce their command by a penance; for instance, if they said: I command you to abstain from cursing, or otherwise not to touch a drop of wine the whole day, or not to eat meat, or to fast in the evening, or to give a certain alms to the poor, or to say a rosary, I am certain that the bad habit would soon be eradicated, and the tongue would be kept under due restraint. The threat of the rod, and the recollection of the pain it causes, are enough to make the most disobedient child submissive; the whip, well applied once or twice, can tame the most fiery horse; much more, then, will a severe, self-imposed penance help a reasoning being to abstain from evil. Only try it; it will certainly help, and when God sees that you are really in earnest with your efforts to amend, he will not refuse to help you with still more powerful graces.

Ah, may God preserve you from the folly and madness of losing your souls for the sake of cursing and indulging in a vice that can bring you neither profit nor pleasure! Make up your minds, once for all, to give up that hellish language! Begin your amendment this very day; continue it to-morrow and every day of your lives. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

UNWORTHY COMMUNION.

"But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper."—Luke 14 : 24.

What a poor excuse: "I have bought a farm!" What if you have? Does that prevent you from going to the supper? Oh, I must go and see it! You should have done that before buying it, so as to see whether it suits you or not. "I have bought five yoke of oxen." Well, does that prevent you from accepting the invitation? I must try them. What, in the evening, with the dark night coming on? "I have married a wife." And if you have, do you not want food or drink any more? Why not tell the truth at once: I will not come. By the great Supper, we understand the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to which our Lord invites all men in the most friendly manner frequently to receive his Flesh and Blood in the holy Communion. But how many refusals he receives from most people, who approach this holy Table but very seldom! How many vain excuses are framed by people who try to persuade themselves that they cannot communicate frequently! Yet today I must complain still more bitterly of those Christians who communicate far too often and too readily, and who would do better by abstaining from Communion altogether. If I knew who they were, I should have just cause for crying out to them, when they approach the altar rails: Away with you! Keep away from here! This Table is not prepared for you! I tell you that not one of you shall partake of it. And who are they? I mean those alone who receive holy Communion with an impure conscience, in the state of sin. What a fearful sin they

commit! And how many Catholics there are who are guilty of it!

I. To approach the table of the Lord in the state of sin, is to treat Jesus Christ most unjustly.

II. Yet there are many who treat him thus.

I. The greatest insult that a creature can offer to God is blasphemy; and that because it is a crime against the divine Majesty. The same is to be said of the reception of holy Communion in the state of sin; for amongst the crimes that attack the divine Majesty directly, it is one of the greatest, since by it Christ is shamefully ill-used. To speak insultingly of a king, especially in his presence, is a most intolerable crime against human majesty, and is punished with death; and yet it is committed only by words, which are carried away by the wind, and inflict no wound. But to attack the king's person when he is seated on his throne, surrounded by his attendants and courtiers, or when he is passing in state through the streets, or when he is seated at a public banquet; to attack him then and plunge a dagger in his heart would be a crime that no one but a madman would commit or dream of.

Such is the insolence, or rather madness, you are guilty of when you dare to receive holy Communion in the state of sin. You pierce with a sword of sorrow the Heart of Jesus when you receive his most sacred Flesh and Blood with a heart and conscience defiled by sin. "Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and of the Blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). It is the living bread: "I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my Flesh, for the life of the world" (John 6 : 51, 52). This life you destroy by an unworthy Communion, for you cause its efficacy to be destroyed in you, and you make it kill your soul, instead of causing it to

live. It is true, according to St. Paul, that every mortal sin crucifies and slaps again the Son of God: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God" (Hebr. 6 : 6); still that is done in a moral sense by disgracing his image impressed upon the human soul, which dies by sin; but in an unworthy Communion the Prototype himself has to suffer, since he is present in his own sacred and divine person under the appearance of bread and wine. In other things we offend God in his creatures, but in this we offend him in his own person, and that, too, while he is seated at his own table, where he offers himself to his dear friends as their food and drink; on his throne of glory, surrounded by Angels, who wait on him; and in his public triumph, in which he shows himself to receive the adoration of all.

The chief end our Lord had in view in instituting the Blessed Sacrament was that he might be repaid on earth for all the labor and trouble, the frequent hunger and thirst, the watching and fasting, the pains and torments, the insults and injuries, that his sacred Body had to endure during his thirty-three years' life on earth; and that all the members of the true Church should henceforth show him all the more humble homage and all the greater honor, in proportion to the insults and contumely he endured for their sake. From the very beginning up to the present time the Catholic Church has distinguished herself by paying the greatest honor to the Blessed Sacrament; therefore we build churches, and have them consecrated, because the hidden God, really and bodily present, takes up his abode in them. Altars are erected and adorned, because every day the bread and wine are changed on them into the Body and Blood of Christ; day and night candles and lamps burn before the tabernacle; all who enter the church bend the knee in profound adoration before him. In a word, nearly every devotion of the Church is directed to the Blessed Sacrament, in order to show honor to it. See now, wicked Christian, what you do when you dare to receive holy Communion in the state of

sin; you attack your king when he is publicly seated on his throne of honor and glory; you cast him into the mire of sin, and thus cause him a moral suffering and death, which he feels far more acutely than that he had to suffer long ago at the hands of the Jews and the executioners.

1. One of the bitterest pangs our Lord felt in his Passion was caused by the treason of Judas; and that because the traitor kissed his Master under the appearance of friendship. "Judas," said he, "dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22 : 48.) As if he wished to add: My friend, the kiss I give thee comes from a heart that loves thee truly; but it is not so with thy kiss. If thou desirest to deliver me into the hands of my enemies, why didst thou not do so in another way? Thou couldst have given them another sign, and said: There is he whom you wish to capture; go and seize him. It would have caused me less pain than to betray me to my sworn enemies by means of a sign of friendship and love. How much more keenly must not his heart feel the pang caused by the hypocrisy of some Christians, his own beloved children, who approach him with downcast eyes, modest and humble demeanor, and folded hands, not merely to give him a kiss, but to receive him into their hearts, that they may treacherously stab him to the heart and imbue their hands in his sacred Blood.

2. The next insult that caused our Lord great pain during his Passion was the mockery with which the soldiers and executioners treated him when they publicly scorned him as a mock-king. Jesus is the King of glory; but then he was a Teacher of humility, clad in an old purple garment, with a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hands as sceptre, with a hard stone for a throne; in that guise he was surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and executioners, who, amidst bursts of derisive laughter, frequently smote him on the cheek, and, bending the knee before him in mockery, cried out: "Hail, King of the Jews!" And yet, presumptuous Christian, do you not

ill-treat in the same manner your glorified Saviour, who is now reigning in triumph as King of heaven, when you receive holy Communion in the state of sin? You bend the knee, and bow the head before his altar; you humble yourself and beat your breast, and adore him with folded hands, and thus you outwardly show him all reverence; but what is it all but mocking and laughing at your God as a mock-king; for your heart is still embittered against him, and you buffet him anew by the fearful sacrilege you are committing?

3. Finally, the Jews nailed our Lord to the Cross, and thus put him to death. But you, false Christians, nail him to a far more painful and disgraceful cross than the sinless tree was. For you shut him up in a foul prison, where he must put up with sin, than which nothing is more intolerable to him, as his companion. They who crucified him knew him not, and looked upon him as a poor, lowly mortal, who was condemned to a shameful death by the judge's sentence; "for," as St. Paul says, "if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2 : 8). But you, when you approach the holy Table and receive holy Communion, know well and believe that he whom you are receiving is your God, your Saviour, your future Judge, and your greatest Benefactor, for you know and believe that this Sacrament, which you so shamefully abuse with your impure conscience, is the most noble gift of God. On the Cross Christ readily fulfilled the will of his heavenly Father, redeemed the world by his Blood, and restrained the power of the devil; that sweetened the bitterness of his painful death so that he longed for it, and had no rest until his desire for death was satisfied. But in your sacrilegious Communion he is tortured against his will; on the cross to which you nail him he finds nothing but ingratitude, inhuman malice, and everything that can deserve his hatred, his curse, and his reprobation. Hell is a more suitable place for the Almighty God than the house of a sinner. And why? Because

in hell he is a Lord of vengeance and a just Judge, who punishes his wicked enemies with deserved torments; whereas in the heart of a sinner he is compelled to lie, like a prisoner, in a loathesome dungeon, where he is kept, so to speak, only for the purpose of being tortured.

Oh, man, see how shamefully you ill-treat your Saviour when you receive holy Communion in the state of sin! What can you be thinking of, as you kneel at the altar-rails, with your conscience reproaching you, as it must do, with mortal sin? What does your heart feel when you see the priest coming toward you with the Sacred Host in his hand, and you open your mouth to receive it into your sinful bosom? Are you not afraid of your Judge? Do you not tremble before the Almighty, in whose presence the purest spirits of heaven are penetrated with a reverential awe? Do you not fear that the lightning will fall from heaven and strike you dead on the spot, or that the earth will open to swallow you up? Is it possible that, among Catholics, any one can be found so presumptuous as to dare to receive holy Communion in the state of mortal sin? I fear that this fearful sin is often committed by Catholics.

II. There are many kinds of people who generally receive holy Communion in the state of mortal sin; namely, the unchaste, the vindictive, the unjust, the culpably ignorant; I will say nothing of those who communicate through sheer malice.

1. First, with regard to the unchaste. How many are there not of both sexes, both married and single, who make a custom of this sin? For they sin either with themselves, or with others for years and years; and during that time their desires tend to illicit intercourse with others, and they either remain in the same house, or otherwise in the proximate occasion of sin with their accomplice, or, if the occasion is wanting them, they have at least a constant desire for sins of impurity. Meanwhile, they communicate several times a year. What are such

people thinking of? Oh, they say, we go to confession beforehand. God help them! what a poor confession theirs is! For they can have neither true sorrow nor purpose of amendment, since they remain in the occasion of sin; and thus they burden their souls with a new sacrilege. All their Communions are bad and sacrilegious.

2. Secondly, the vindictive; I mean those who for a long time have been at enmity and variance with their neighbor, and who, although they say with their lips I forgive him, and bear no ill-will to him, yet avoid him through spite and refuse to salute him; burst almost with envy when they hear him praised, and exult with a secret joy when they hear of his misfortunes, and, if they are in the same trade or employment, do their best to ruin him. Alas, how many people there are who communicate in that state! Neighbors, relations, sometimes brothers and sisters go every month to the Table of the Lord, and yet they hardly speak to each other once in the month through hatred and ill-will. Is that the way to make a worthy Communion? Does not Christ expressly say: "If thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there shalt remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and first go to be reconciled to thy brother; and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5 : 23, 24). If you do not accuse yourselves of those things in confession, what sort of a confession do you make? For you are acting in flagrant violation of the law of Christ: "But I say to you: Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you" (Matt. 5 : 44). If you confess those sins each time, but without the intention of being reconciled to your enemy, and are nevertheless allowed to go to holy Communion, what sort of a confessor have you? You must know that all your Communions are sacrilegious.

3. Thirdly, the unjust, who possess wrongfully what belongs to others, and do not restore it when they can and ought to restore it. Alas! how many there are who know, or at least

ought to know, that that piece of land, that house, that money, or whatever it may be, does not lawfully belong to them, and still continue to keep possession of it! How many who know that they oppress the poor unjustly and wilfully cause them loss and injury; who know that they defraud their laborers and servants of their wages, either wholly or partially; how many who have knowingly bought stolen things, or kept what they found without looking for the owner, or cheated in buying, selling, or in other ways; and yet keep all they have thus unjustly gained without the intention of making restitution, or indemnifying the other for the losses caused him, and who remain in that state for ten or twenty years, or even longer, and go to confession and Communion all the time! Oh, my God, what sacrilegious confessions and Communions those are! who can count the number of them!

4. But what hope is there for the fourth class, which is by far the most numerous? They flatter themselves when they go to Communion that they are in the state of grace, and yet they are mistaken. They imagine they have no mortal sin on their conscience, and yet they have enough of them, and that through sheer culpable ignorance, because they do not want to know anything of the sinful lives they lead. They consist of those who have become accustomed to a certain vice, such as drunkenness, detraction, cursing, swearing, and other sins, which they confess each time, but never repent of. They think that it is enough for them to tell everything clearly in confession, and that then they need give themselves no further trouble. They never think of the sorrow and purpose of amendment, which, humanly speaking, it is impossible for them to have with sincerity; at least, the fact of their continued relapse into their former sins shows sufficiently that neither their confessions nor their Communions have had any effect on their souls; for these two Sacraments, if received properly, frequently, and with good dispositions, must necessarily purify the

soul and sanctify it. Ah, whoever you may be, I have one request to make of you, and that is that you abstain from Communion, even at Easter, even on your deathbed, unless you intend to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to give up your illicit intercourse, to lay aside your hatred and ill-will against your neighbor, to restore what you unjustly possess, and to amend your sinful customs and unlawful abuses. Again, I entreat you, abstain from Communion! It is true that if you do not communicate at Easter-time you commit a grievous sin against the precept of the Church, which I do not wish by any means to advise you to commit; still you are guilty of only one sin thereby, and that a much less grievous one than you would commit by an unworthy Communion, in which you would offer a most grievous insult to Jesus Christ. If you have not a sincere purpose of amendment, do not communicate, even on your deathbed; it is true that you will then be lost forever, and I do not by any means wish to advise you to incur eternal damnation; still, your damnation will not be so deep as it would be if you went into eternity loaded with the weight of an unworthy Communion. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE WICKEDNESS OF DEFAMING THE CHARACTER OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

"*And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners.*"—Luke 15 : 2.

"Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto him to hear him." Certainly their intention was a good one, and who could find fault with it? Christ receives sinners; he goes in

search of them; he goes into their houses; he eats and drinks with them, so as to win their hearts and convert them to God. A most holy work, indeed, and who could have anything to say against it? And yet there were false and wicked tongues that spat out poison, murmured and complained, and cried down our Lord as a public sinner on account of that holy work. "The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying: this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." But, if that was a good work, why did they complain of it? If it was wicked, why did they not represent that to Christ himself, in the spirit of fraternal correction? Why did they talk about it everywhere behind his back? I am not so much surprised to find the wicked Jews guilty of acting in that way, for they were filled with bitter hatred and envy against our Lord; but it is surprising that the same fault should exist amongst us Christians. What is more common among not only those who have a deadly hatred toward each other, but also among friends and relations, and Christians who otherwise are lovers of peace, and seem to lead holy lives, than for one to speak behind another's back of what he has seen or heard of him, to make his faults and defects the subject of conversation, and to rob him of his good name, and lessen his reputation by murmuring against and finding fault with him? This vice of uncharitable tongues is as common as it is grievous and damnable, nor can one speak often enough against it, because generally it becomes almost incurable on account of the habit of loquacity it fosters. Hence I say:

To defame the character of others is one of the most grievous of vices.

He who defames his neighbor severs the bond of charity, harmony, and union, which should exist among men, and by that fact alone is guilty of one of the most grievous of vices, since he acts against the fundamental law of charity. "Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." Still, great and important as is this command to love God, he places another command in the same rank with it: "And the second is like to this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22 : 39); that is, every one, great or small, rich or poor, friend or enemy, good or bad; and you must love them all as yourself. Nay, God frequently commands you, under pain of sin, to set aside the service you owe him when the love of your neighbor requires you to do so. For instance, there is a sick person whom you must attend to, and there is no one to take your place; what are you to do under those circumstances? It is true that you are bound to hear Mass every Sunday and holyday under pain of mortal sin; but not in this case, for the love of your neighbor has a prior claim on you; you must remain with the sick man if he is really in need of you and would suffer great inconvenience if deprived of your services; so that you must omit hearing the Mass that you would otherwise be bound to offer to God. Jesus Christ our Saviour has given to his disciples, and in their persons to all of us, many beautiful instructions and exhortations; but there is nothing he impresses on us so forcibly as mutual charity. How often did he not repeat, both before and after his resurrection, the words: "These things I command you, that you love one another;" "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another" (John 15 : 17). On this charity depends the observance of all the laws of God, as Christ tells us: "On these two commandments"—namely, that of the love of God, and that of the love of our neighbor—"dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (Matt. 22 : 40). "My little children, love one another," was the only sermon that St. John, the beloved disciple, preached to his disciples; for, said he, if you do that, it suffices.

Wicked, uncharitable tongues, what do you do when you talk about, criticise, ridicule, and find fault with the actions, the failings, and the defects of the absent? You violate the great

fundamental law of charity; you break the bond of union that should exist amongst those for whom Christ died, that they might love one another; you cause those who listen to you to have a similar ill-will and aversion to the person you speak ill of, so that they lose the good opinion they formerly may have had of him. Nor will they, if they are as fond of talking as you are, keep to themselves what they have heard, but will make a point of spreading it about just as wickedly as you did, until everybody in the place knows all about it. Finally, what effect do you think your talk will have on the person of whom you speak, supposing it comes to his ears? What is more likely than that anger, ill-will, hatred, and desire of revenge will take the place of charity? You see now that with one breath, one uncharitable word, you have destroyed the peace, unity and charity that God has so emphatically recommended to us! This it is that makes the sin of injuring another's character so odious to God and man.

There is nothing which proves more clearly the wickedness of uncharitable talk than the great value of the treasure it robs one of. The greater the value of the property that is injured, the greater is the harm done. But of all the natural and temporal possesions that a man can have on this earth, is there any which is more esteemed, valued, and loved, than a good name or reputation? God, our religion, the world and its prudence, all unite in saying to and inculcating on every one that he must preserve his good name. God exhorts us: "Take care of a good name; for this shall continue with thee, more than a thousand treasures precious and great" (Ecclus. 41 : 15). Our religion calls a good name the good odor of a Christian life, which encourages men to practise virtue, as much as the bad example and scandal-giving betray men to evil. The maxims and principles of the world forbid any one to suffer the least taint to rest on his honor. Ask any honorable man whether he would prefer to be looked upon as dishonorable, or to lose a hundred

dollars. Away! he would say at once; away with all my money! My good name is far more to me! I would rather be poor and keep my good name, than rich and dishonorable. There is nothing more pleasant than good health, and there is nothing sweeter than life, to preserve which a man will readily sacrifice all his wealth. And yet honor and a good reputation are sweeter and more pleasant than life and health. How many there are who risk their lives for the sake of making a name for themselves! And why? The reason of that the Holy Ghost gives: "A good life hath its number of days; but a good name shall continue forever" (Ecclus. 41 : 16); everything we can enjoy during life comes to an end in a short time, but a good name is not confined to this life, for it lasts after death, and is carried down to posterity. Hence, a good name is called the moral life of a man, and he who takes it away is called by the Apostle a murderer.

Murderers you are, then, you who defame your neighbor and take away his moral and most precious life. One can compare you to nothing better than to that stone that was cut from the mountain without hands, as we read in the Book of Daniel. King Nabuchodonosor once saw in a dream a great statue, the head of which was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Suddenly the whole statue fell to pieces and crumbled into dust, which was blown away by the wind. What was the cause of this utter ruin? A single stone that fell from the mountain. "A stone was cut out of a mountain, without hands, and it struck the statue" (Dan. 2 : 34). And on what part of the statue did the stone fall? On the golden head, the silver breast, the brazen body, or the iron legs? No; for it could not have broken those metals; but it fell on the feet, that were of clay. "It struck the statue upon the feet thereof, and broke them in pieces" (Dan. 34 : 35). A picture of what is done every day in the world by uncharitable

tongues. Many a one is as beautiful as gold in virtue and piety, as shining as silver in his purity, as strong as brass and iron in his constancy, while the good name he enjoys makes him like a beautiful statue in the eyes of men. And yet, how little is required to overthrow this statue and reduce it do dust! A single stone is enough; that is, a single word of calumny or detraction.

Man's good name is so precious in the sight of God that, generally speaking, whenever he mentions the wicked in Holy Scripture he conceals their names, that they may not be known. In the Book of Genesis we read of the presumption of those who attempted to build the tower of Babel. Who was the first to propose the building of it? Who made the plan? We know not; all we read is: "And each one said to his neighbor: come, let us make bricks, and bake them with fire" (Gen. 11 : 3). In the same Book we read that the people of Sodom surrounded the house of Lot, in order to seize the strangers whom he had harbored; not one of those wicked people is mentioned by name. In the Book of Exodus the king who persecuted the Israelites is called Pharao, a name that was common to all the Egyptian kings; which of the Pharaos he was is not recorded. In the Book of Leviticus you will read of a blasphemer who was stoned, in the Book of Numbers of one who profaned the Sabbath by servile works, but you cannot find out the name of either of them, nor of the Levite, whom we read of in the Book of Judges, who adored an idol in the house of Michas. In the Gospels we seldom find the name of the guilty persons recorded; they are called by general appellations, such as Scribes and Pharisees, the buyers and sellers in the temple, the woman who was a public sinner, one of the servants buffeting Jesus, the soldiers mocking him. Whereby God gives us to understand how he hates and detests vice, but at the same time how careful he is of the sinner's reputation, since he does not mention his name.

For the same reason God has strictly forbidden any one to mention even in confession the sin of another, when the latter is known to the confessor, who is still ignorant of his sin. But here I must remind you that it is a different matter to mention the fault of another to a confessor, or to some other person, with the intention of being helped to amend one's own fault, or of helping one's neighbor to amend; for in that case the laws of fraternal correction oblige us to speak of the shortcomings of others, if we cannot induce them to correct those faults by privately admonishing them; otherwise it would be a great mistake to mention others by name in confession, and yet it is a common one. For instance, it often happens that the confessor is acquainted, or likely will be acquainted, with all the members of a family, husband, wife, brothers, sisters and servants. The wife comes to confession (I am not repeating anything heard in confession; I am merely saying what might happen), and, though she ought to mention nothing but her own sins, she begins something in the following style: Alas! I have cursed, and sworn, and given way to impatience very often; but I cannot help it; I am driven almost to desperation; my husband is enough to drive me mad; he gambles away all we earn; he is drunk nearly every day, and when he is in that state one is not safe with him; he goes to houses of ill-fame. But what has that to do with your confession? You do not come here to accuse your husband, but yourself. You have cursed, and been impatient, and have almost despaired; these are your sins, and you should have told them without saying anything of your husband, who was the occasion of those sins. The husband acts in the same way with regard to his wife, and neither of them has gained anything by confession, but each has taken away the other's good name. Mothers, too, often act in the same way: I have a disobedient, wayward son, who will not obey me; he curses and abuses me if I give him good advice, and I cannot help myself; I must give way to my anger, and

curse him in turn. My sister, says another, is so snappish and unkind that I cannot bear her. But what has your son or your sister to do with your sins? What does the confessor want to know about their faults? Would you be satisfied if your children and relations were to mention your faults in confession? Hush! you must not mention any one's name; it is not only quite unnecessary to do so, but it is also injurious to the fair fame of your neighbor; you cannot mention the sins of another, even under the seal of confession and to your confessor, without committing another sin; for he either knows the person you mention, or will likely know him at some future time, and thus the latter's good name will suffer.

From all this you must draw the following conclusion: If it is forbidden, even with the protection of the seal of confession, which binds the confessor so strictly that he can no more speak of what he hears therein than if he had never heard it, and if theologians say with good reason that one is bound rather to conceal the nature of his sin, which should otherwise be declared in confession, rather than run the risk of injuring the character of another; if it is forbidden under those circumstances to disclose another's sin, how grievous, how inexcusable must not be the malice of those evil-tongued persons who, in company, without any cause whatever, speak of the faults and defects that they have seen, heard of, or noticed in others, or even merely suspected them of, whether they do so out of hatred, envy and malice, or out of mere loquacity; for they rob their neighbor of his good name, that best of all natural possessions, which is so important in the eyes of God and man! With reason does St. Bernard cry out three times in succession: "Detraction is a great vice; detraction is a grievous sin; detraction is an enormous crime!" And yet, alas! what a common thing it is in the world nowadays, among people of all classes and conditions! I conclude with the advice of the Holy Ghost: "Keep yourselves, therefore, from murmuring, which profiteth

nothing, and refrain your tongue from detraction" (Wisd. 1 : 11). Let each one make the resolution with David: "that my mouth may not speak the works of men" (Ps. 16 : 4). The works of men are sins, faults, defects; whatever is good and praiseworthy in them is the work of divine grace. If, then, you must speak of others, relate openly and fearlessly what they have received from God, but be careful not to allow the least word to escape that might injure them or lessen their reputation. Let each one remember the golden rule of charity: Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you. Never say in the absence of others what you would not say in their presence. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE FOLLY OF THE PROUD.

"*We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.*" —Luke 5 : 5.

No wonder that the fishermen brought their nets and boats to land in sheer vexation. Why should they give themselves further trouble? They had labored all the night and had taken nothing. They were tired of this useless toil. How many there are nowadays who also labor in vain! The world is often compared to a great sea, in which worldlings toil day and night to secure a large fish; some fish for honors, praise, reputation, and authority amongst men; others for wealth and temporal goods; others for sinful and impure pleasures. After having toiled and troubled for many years, they must at last cry out, like the Apostles: "We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing." Nothing is more capable of inducing a reasonable man to withdraw his heart and his desires from the van-

ity of the world, in order to fix them on God and heavenly things, than due knowledge and consideration of this truth. I will speak to-day on the folly of the proud.

You may be great before men, you may also be great before God; yet you act foolishly if you are great in your own eyes and have a high opinion of yourself.

1. That which makes one great before men consists mostly in the gifts and goods of nature which one has, such as a good understanding, prudence, knowledge, learning, skill, bravery, and the beauty and perfection of the body; or it may consist also in external advantages, such as riches, honors, dignities, nobility of birth, renown, praise, the love and good wishes of the people, etc. These and similar things appear great and noble in the eyes of the world, which generally judges by mere outward appearances. Such gifts and goods are to be valued in themselves only in so far as they help us to our last end, that is, to serve God and save our souls. On the other hand, that which makes one great before God is the possession of supernatural goods and the gifts of grace, especially sanctifying grace and the friendship of God, the Christian virtues, diligence in the practice of good works, the beauty of the soul and holiness of life. A poor beggar who possesses these things, although the world looks on him as an outcast, is worth far more, in the sight of God and his Saints, than princes, kings, or emperors who are deficient in them.

It is impossible for a man to be great before God once he commences to be great in his own opinion. He cannot be holy unless he is little in his own eyes and humble of heart. No matter what virtues a man has, no matter what good works he performs, they are worth nothing unless they be supported by humility. No matter how prudent, wise, and clever he may be, he acts in thought and imagination like a fool. Why so? He who has nothing of his own, and who knows that at any mo-

ment that which is entrusted to him, but does not belong to him, may be demanded from him by the rightful owner, acts foolishly if he thinks himself great and gives way to pride. All of us are poor, and we need not go beyond ourselves to find reasons for being humble, and having a low opinion of ourselves; for, if we consider what we have from nature, we are nothing; it is from nothing the Creator has drawn us; a hundred years ago all here present were nothing; can anything be viler or more worthless than nothing? Dust and ashes and corruption are the first materials of our being, so that each one of us can truly say, with holy Job: "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms: My mother and my sister" (Job 17 : 14).

Therefore, lest we should forget the vileness of our origin, and think ourselves greater than we are, the Catholic Church, in the beginning of Lent, when the ashes are sprinkled on our foreheads, reminds us of the words of God: "Remember, man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3 : 19). If you are tempted to self-complacency or pride, remember your origin, whence you are, and what you have of yourself, and the temptation will soon vanish: Consider, oh, man, whence thou comest, and blush.

Let us consider, too, what we are in ourselves, with regard to the state of grace, and we shall find that we are not even good; for we are born slaves of the devil; we are conceived in sin, born in sin, and sin is the only inheritance we bring into this world. Could there be a greater misery or misfortune than ours? Oh, how humble this thought compels us to be! I am a sinner; I am an object of the hatred and anger of God; I am a child of damnation, and therefore worthy to be looked down upon and despised by all creatures.

2. But if we have something more than nothingness, and something better than sin, if we are in the state of grace, and are friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, if we possess, besides, a goodly share of natural gifts and temporal blessings, where

do they come from, to whom do they all belong? Are they not pure gifts of God, who has given them to us gratuitously? What am I saying? Given them to us? We have only the keys of them, that we may look after them; at any moment, how and when it pleases him, God can take them from us.

With regard to natural gifts and goods, who can doubt that the same is to be said of them, unless he who doubts the truth of the Word of God? "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; he humbleth and he exalteth; he raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dung-hill" (1 Kings 2 : 7, 8). Even the goods we have gained, as we think, by our own labor and trouble, do not belong to us, but are the free gifts of God's goodness.

With regard to supernatural goods, St. Paul says that we are incapable of doing the least good of ourselves, but we cannot even say a single good word without the help and influence of the Holy Ghost: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12 : 3). Nor is this enough; we cannot even wish to do anything good of ourselves, as the same Apostle writes to the Philippians: "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will" (Philipp. 11 : 13). And, what makes our incapacity still more evident, it is not in our power to form a good thought without the help of God. "Not that we are sufficient to think of anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3 : 5). So that everything natural and supernatural that we have in body or soul belongs to God alone.

3. Have we, then, any reason to be proud and haughty? to look upon ourselves as greater and better than others? to have a vain complacency in ourselves? to give way to self-conceit and despise others who have received less from God? Oh, that would indeed be folly and madness on our part! "Why dost thou glory?" as St. Paul says; poor worm of the earth, why dost thou give way to self-conceit? how long wilt thou plume thyself

on thy possessions? "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory?" (1 Cor. 4 : 7). Foolish man, show me something that is thine; thou canst not point to anything worth a straw; thou hast but the nothingness out of which God has drawn thee, and, still worse, sin, which thou hast brought with thee into the world. Why dost thou glory? What cause hast thou to be proud?

Are you rich? Have you a large estate, much money and property? Can you lead a comfortable life? Does the world look upon you as happy? Still, "why dost thou glory?" Do you think a great deal of yourself? If so, are you better and greater, on that account, than others who are not so rich as you? Why should you be? Where did you get your wealth from? To whom does it really belong? Is it not simply lent to you by the Almighty God? How, then, can you boast of it? Suppose, in order to make the matter clearer by a simile, that one is so reduced in circumstances by misfortune that he has to be supported by alms privately given, but that, by the help of those alms, he can keep up appearances, and dress in a manner becoming his state. Ordinary people, who know nothing of his poverty, are as respectful to him as if he were still rich. Who is that man? they ask; to judge by his dress and appearance, he must be a man of position. If he were to hear what they say of him, what would he think? Would he give way to pride and vanity? Oh, if he did that, he would be a most intolerable fool! God help me, he would rather think, with shame in his heart and tears in his eyes; I am a rich man, when I am living on alms given me for God's sake! What would I do without my benefactor? If he dies, what will become of me? I should have to beg, in spite of my grand clothes, or else starve with hunger. No; all the honor and respect shown such a man only serve to shame and humble him. Oh, man, no matter how rich you are, have you not the same cause for humility? Where do your riches come from? Are they not an alms given you by

God, who, in his mercy, and according to his wise decrees, sends them to you, as it were, privately? Whenever he wishes he can take them from you and reduce you to beggary. Why, then, do you glory and exalt yourself above others?

Are you quick of understanding, so that you can learn several arts and sciences with little trouble? Men admire and praise you on that account; but are you, therefore, any greater or better than others? To whom do your talents belong? Are they not an alms that God has given you gratuitously? Why, then, do you give way to proud thoughts? Suppose that I am wandering about on a dark night in a forest; I have lost my way and know not where to go. Suddenly, to my great delight, I see a man with a lantern a few yards off; he takes pity on me and guides my steps to the nearest village; with the help of his lantern I can see as well as if it were day. On the following morning other travelers arrive, who complain of having been compelled to remain in the forest all night, because it was so dark that they could not find their way. Oh, you stupid people, I say to them, how did that happen? It makes no matter to me whether it is dark or light, I can find my way in either case. What a clever man you must be, they think. What would you think of such conduct on my part? Would it not be a foolish thing to boast in that way, and to seek the praise of others? Ah, I must think to myself, if that good man had not had the kindness to accompany me with his lantern, I, too, should have had to spend the night in the forest. In the same way, he who is gifted with more intelligence than others must say to himself, with deep humility: If the Lord did not go before me with that light, "which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1 : 9), I should be as stupid and dull as the most uncultivated of men. The talent that God has given me he can take away from me, so that the praise and honor I receive do not belong to me. Not to me, oh, Lord, not to me, but to thee and to thy name be honor!

You are prosperous in all your affairs; whatever you begin, you are enabled to finish; whatever you undertake, you are sure of carrying out successfully; you perform all your duties in a praiseworthy manner; but what if you do? Is that a reason why you should have a great opinion of yourself, or give way to self-complacency? Are you on that account greater or better than others, who do not always succeed, and who are not able to do what you can? It would be foolish for you to think that. For, why is it that you can do more than others? Is it not because God has given you a greater alms than he has given them? God is the skilful Master, who knows how to make use of his creatures as instruments for different purposes; he it is who can of the stones raise up children to Abraham—nay, he can use each creature for any purpose he pleases; so that he could give a fly the power of building up heaven and earth. Now, if this Almighty God has chosen you, instead of others, to perform great exploits, or to exercise great skill in any art, that is not to your credit, but rather to that of the skilful Master who knows how to make use of you so well. If, instead of using you, he had preferred a most ignorant person, the latter would have been just as successful as you are now; so that, as far as you are concerned, you are not a bit better than he is. Why are you, then, so foolish as to have a high opinion of yourself?

Are you of commanding stature or beautiful person, so that you attract the eyes and hearts of all? Do you, therefore, spend half the day before the looking-glass, admiring your beauty? Do you trick yourself out as beautifully as possible, and then show yourself off before the public, so as to court admiration? What a senseless vanity is yours, if so! It is just as if one picture wished to extol itself above another, because it is finished in clearer colors, although both depend on the will of the painter, who has only to give one touch with his brush in order to change the likeness of a beautiful angel into that of a hor-

rible demon. Or, to use a comparison more to the point, it is as if a chimney, blackened with smoke, were to boast of its appearance because in the winter-time it is covered with snow. How long will the snow last? The first shower of rain, or a good fire kindled on the hearth underneath, will put an end to it at once, and the chimney will be as black and ugly as it was before. Vain worldling, why are you proud of your beauty? What else is it but a color that the Great Artist has given to your body? Can he not at once destroy it, if he wishes? A festering sore, a cancer, a fever, is quite enough to put an end to it. Wait a few years: old age will bring its wrinkles, or else the soul, in its flight from the body, will leave it to worms and rottenness. Think of the couch which awaits you after death, and there will soon be an end of your pride: "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering."

Finally, and speaking of those goods which alone are worthy of praise, are you great in the sight of the Lord God, are you pious, holy, zealous in his service? Do you know of no sins to trouble your conscience? If so, I congratulate you, for you are far better off than all those who are in the state of sin. But certainly you have least cause of all to be proud, and far the greatest cause to be humble and lowly in the grace and favor of God. For where do your piety and holiness come from? Is it from yourself? Certainly your co-operation has been required, but your holiness first came from the special grace and assistance of God. If he abandoned you to your own weakness for a moment what would become of you? A child may laugh and enjoy itself as long as its mother leads or carries it about; but it cannot be proud on that account, because if the mother leaves it alone for a moment it falls down at once. You can rejoice and be glad in the Lord because you have a good conscience, and you can thank him for the special graces he has given you; but to have a great opinion of yourself, and im-

agine that you are greater and better than others, would be folly indeed.

You see, then, that no man, no matter how great he is before the world, or even in the sight of God, if he considers well his circumstances, can have the least cause for self-glorification; but rather every cause to be humble, lowly, and meek before God and men. You see how true are the words: "For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." In a word, he who thinks much of himself, and desires the esteem of others, is not a wise man, but a fool.

We must never look down upon, much less despise or treat contemptuously any one, even the meanest beggar, or the greatest sinner; for he has just as much and just as little of his own as we have. Finally, in all the contradictions we meet with, whether they come from God in the shape of crosses and trials, or from men who insult and injure us, or put us to shame and humiliation, we must always be satisfied in all humility, and think: I am nothing of myself; I deserve nothing good, so that no injury is done me, if I do not get the praise, reputation, or pleasure I desire. I came into the world a sinner, deserving of hell; it is quite right, then, for me to suffer the punishment of sin; I have no reason to complain if anything is done to cause me pain, for I deserve hell and all its torments.

Ah, Christians, if we only thought of this always! Oh, humility, would that thou wert as common amongst us as the reasons we have for being humble are numerous! What a change there would be in us! Amen.

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost.

THE IRREPARABLE INJURY CAUSED BY DEFAMING ANOTHER'S CHARACTER.

"*First go to be reconciled to thy brother.*"—Matt. 5 : 24.

What a difficult thing it is for people, when they are once embittered against each other, to be thoroughly reconciled; and yet it is an absolutely necessary thing to salvation; for without it all one's confessions and Communions are sacrilegious and cannot merit the grace of forgiveness. I have lately spoken of the vice of defaming our neighbor, and have shown how grievous it is, because it violates Christian charity, and injures our neighbor's fair fame. There is still another point to be explained in order to deter you all the more from this fearful vice, and to show those who are guilty in this respect what they have to do. And what is that? "First go to be reconciled to thy brother." Have you said anything to injure his fair fame? "Go to be reconciled to him," and to all those whose honor you have attacked; make good the harm you have done. How easy it is to offend in this matter of defaming our neighbor, but how hard and difficult to atone for the injury done! This I shall now proceed to show.

I. Amongst all sins there is none so difficult to atone for or to make reparation for, as the sin of injuring our neighbor's character.

II. What must we to avoid it?

I. If he who has defamed another wishes to be reconciled to God and to his neighbor, and to atone for his sin, besides a true repentance, a firm purpose of amendment, and a candid declaration of his sin in confession, he must make complete reparation

for the injury he has inflicted on his neighbor's character, whether he has simply lessened that character or taken it away altogether, provided such reparation be possible. This truth needs no proof. "The sin will not be forgiven, unless that which is unjustly taken away be restored to its lawful owner."

But how difficult it is to make this reparation as it ought to be made! So difficult, that it is generally the next thing to an impossibility! Why so? For the following reasons:

1. In the first place, the reparation must be in proportion to the amount stolen, or to the injury committed; that is, I must give back as much as I have stolen, and make good all the harm I have done. But who can find out that proportion in the matter of injury inflicted on another's character, so as to be able to say: so much and no more have I taken away from that person's good name? You have, for instance, said of that neighbor, or man of business, that he cannot be trusted, and that he cheats people, as you know by experience; of that doctor, that he knows nothing, that he is always drunk when visiting a patient; of that young lady, that she makes herself too common, that you saw her one evening acting improperly; of that servant, that he or she is unfaithful, and takes things secretly out of the house, that you would not have such people in your employment.

Now, what you say in that way to another, or to two or three people, they tell afterwards to others, and these latter spread it still further, so that the evil report against your neighbor soon becomes known to a great number. Sometimes a dog goes quietly along the street, doing no harm to any one, when suddenly some mischievous boys begin to shout and to throw stones at him; at once the whole neighborhood is in an uproar, and every one runs after the poor animal; the other dogs run out of the houses, and, though they are afraid to join in the pursuit, they add to the confusion by barking with the others. Thus a whole crowd of people rush after the poor dog; some

beat him with sticks, others throw stones at him; one says he must be mad, another that he has severely bitten a child, a third that he has stolen some meat in the neighborhood. Meanwhile the poor dog's only fault is his misfortune in meeting the mischievous boys who occasioned the whole uproar. So it is also with the unfortunate and sometimes completely innocent man, who comes across some ill-tongued person. That business man, that doctor, that young girl, that servant, wherever they go, have a bad name, and everybody speaks against them. And how did that come to pass? They came across some one who, either through malice or loquacity, related something bad about them, which he either heard or saw, or merely suspected them to be guilty of; the report was spread from one person to another, from one street to another, until it became the talk of the town. See, oh, ill-tongued man, what mischief you have done by your imprudence! You are to blame for it all; you were the first to cause your neighbor's reputation to suffer, and no matter how many have helped to spread the report, the origin of it is to be traced to you. Now, if you wish to atone for your fault, you are bound in conscience to restore your neighbor's good name with all those people to whom you have defamed it, and in proportion as you have defamed it to each one, so that he will enjoy just the same good reputation as before. But who does not see that it is almost an impossibility to do this? Nevertheless you are bound absolutely to do it, if you wish to make reparation for the harm you have done by your slanderous tongue. And this, I say, is the obligation which is so hard of fulfilment that it is never properly fulfilled.

2. But there is still another difficulty, another obligation, you have to attend to. And what is that? Besides the loss of character you may have occasioned, you may also have been the cause of a loss in business or other material concerns to those you have maligned. That man of business has lost credit, his customers abandon him; that doctor is no longer em-

ployed, as people are afraid to trust him; that young girl might have married well, but now no one will have anything to say to her; that servant cannot find a place any more. Count up, now, if you can, the amount of injury you have done in each case. All this you are bound to make reparation for, if you wish to make full atonement before God and man for what you have done. But how difficult that is! It is almost an impossibility!

3. Suppose, now, that you have calculated exactly all the injury you have done your neighbor's character, and the amount of loss you have caused him in his business; are you still really determined to make full reparation? Then, if what you have said of your neighbor is false, you are bound to contradict it before every one to whom you said it, and in whose estimation your neighbor's character has suffered in consequence; and you must say to each one of them: What I told you of so and so is not true; it is a lie. If what you said is true, but not yet publicly known, you are bound to do all you can to restore your neighbor's character before all those in whose presence you have injured it. But what an iron resolution it must require to disgrace one's self, to swallow one's own words, and to acknowledge one's own guilt, besides making reparation for the material losses caused! Many and many a slanderer there is in the world; but you will hardly find one in a hundred who makes reparation for the injury done his neighbor's good name. How many have you not heard during your lives speaking ill of others, and injuring their reputation more or less seriously? But can you remember even one who came back to restore his neighbor's character? In spite of the numbers of confessions in which people accuse themselves of slander, there is hardly a case in which due reparation is made.

See, now, how difficult, nay, almost impossible, it is to make due reparation for the injury inflicted on your neighbor's honor, and to make that atonement for your sin which is, absolutely

speaking, required. Oh, in what a labyrinth those talkative and scandalous tongues of ours involve us! How easy it is to get into it; how difficult to get out of it! The word falls from the lips without any trouble; but what great art is required to retract it? With reason the slanderous tongue is compared to a venomous serpent: "If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better that backbiteth secretly" (Eccles. 10 : 1). Some serpents bite so quickly that one hardly feels the fatal wound at first; in the same way a slanderous tongue inflicts a fatal wound on a man's good name, without the sufferer being able to tell how or by whom he is injured. There are serpents so venomous that, once their poison is infused into the blood, nothing but amputation of the injured limb will save the person whom they have bitten. The same may safely be said of slanderous tongues. Once they have poured out their venom, it is almost impossible to heal the wound they have inflicted, that is, to restore the reputation they have ruined. Moses, in order to convince King Pharao that he was sent by the true God, threw his rod on the ground, and it was instantly changed into a serpent; but when he took the serpent into his hand, it became a rod again. Pharao's magicians tried their skill in the same way, but not with the same success; they changed their rods into serpents, but, with all their art, they could not change the serpents back into rods. There you have a specimen of your art, oh, slanderous and evil-tongued people! By your uncharitable talk you cause your neighbor to lose his good reputation, and to appear in the eyes of others like a loathesome serpent; but you are utterly unable to restore the good name you have taken away, and to make full reparation for the injury you have done his honor. Therefore the Holy Ghost warns us to be careful to avoid the voice of slander: "Take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death" (Ecclus. 28 : 30).

II. What is he, then, to do, who knows that he is guilty of

having inflicted a serious injury on his neighbor's character? On the one hand the sin will not be forgiven him unless he is firmly resolved to make full reparation for the wrong he has done, as soon as possible; on the other hand, the difficulty of making this reparation verges almost on the impossible, when the evil report has once been spread abroad. What hope of salvation, then, can there be for such a man? Must he despair? Must I say to him what Father Alexander de Castro once said to a nobleman, who accused himself of having said publicly in company that he had sinned with a certain noble lady, whose name he mentioned, although what he said was quite false? "Away with you! You are lost!" he said to him, knowing well that the nobleman could never bring himself to retract his own words in the same company, and to confess, even on oath, that he had told a lie; and the event proved that the confessor's fears were justified. Must I, too, launch forth the same thunderbolt against all slanderers, and say to each one of them: away with you! you are lost! your confession will not avail you! there is no help for you? No; things have not gone as far as that yet. If you are quite certain that you have injured your neighbor's honor, and injured it seriously, and that you knew that you were doing wrong when you were speaking against him, then you must relate the whole matter, with all its circumstances, to an experienced confessor, who is able to advise you, and he will tell you what to do and will help you out of the difficulty.

Meanwhile, as far as the injury done to your neighbor's honor is concerned, I must tell you, in order to relieve your mind somewhat and to give you a little consolation, that there are many circumstances in which we are not obliged to make reparation for the injury which we think we have done our neighbor's honor (mind, however, that I am speaking of the injury done to his honor alone); for it is a different thing altogether, with regard to the material loss we may have caused him.

1. In the first place, I am not bound to make reparation if I have just reasons for thinking that they who heard me speaking ill of my neighbor did not believe me, or did not look on what I said as dishonorable to him. Sometimes, too, there are people to be found who are publicly known as being apt to say anything that comes into their minds, without any regard for the truth; no sensible man would believe what such people say. Again, when they who are under the influence of violent anger utter all sorts of calumnies against their opponents, in such a way that it is evident they are speaking out of the bitterness of their hearts, out of hatred and vindictiveness, it is clear that no sensible man will believe what they say. And why? Because he has not really injured his neighbor's honor in the estimation of those who were listening to him. A thief wishes to steal; to that end he places the ladder against the window of a house, climbs in during the night, and breaks open the chest, but finds nothing, so that he has to go back empty-handed. He has committed a theft in desire and intention, and has therefore sinned grievously against God and his neighbor; but he is not bound to restitution, because he has not actually stolen anything, or injured any one's property. And so it is, too, with those who, through wantonness, wickedness, hatred, or talkativeness, try to injure their neighbor's character; they commit a griveous sin; but, since no one believes what they say, they have not really injured their neighbor, and are therefore not bound to make reparation.

2. I am not bound to make good my neighbor's injured character if he of whom I have spoken uncharitably has publicly justified himself and proved his innocence, or has otherwise regained his good name in that particular matter in which I have spoken ill of him. Thus, it often happens that a servant, a man of business, is accused of some grievous violation of duty, although afterwards his innocence is clearly proven; in a case of that kind I am not bound to make further reparation; just as a

thief is not bound to make restitution if the lawful owner has succeeded in getting possession of his property again.

3. If I have revealed a secret and disgraceful crime of my neighbor, and the same vice afterwards comes to be publicly known, not through me, nor through those to whom I revealed it, but in some other way, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; because he is publicly dishonored, and has thus lost his right to his good name. Much less am I bound to make reparation if his crime was already known to only a small number of people; because he had already lost his good name before I spoke of him.

4. Suppose that two women or two sworn enemies are quarrelling; they growl and snarl at each other like dogs; they hurl at each other all the abusive epithets they can think of, without caring whether they are true or false, and thus they publicly disgrace themselves before a crowd of people. The question now is, what are they to do to restore each other's good name? They sin grievously by using contumelious expressions toward each other; but, since they both suffer the same amount of injury, neither is bound to make reparation to the other.

5. If a long time has elapsed since the slander was uttered, so that there is a moral certainty that it has fallen into oblivion, and that no one thinks of it any longer, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; for when people forget the slander they are as if they never heard it, and time itself has restored my neighbor's injured character. Nay, in a case of that kind, I am bound to keep silent, so as not to remind people of what they have forgotten, and to avoid doing my neighbor further harm by my efforts to make reparation to him.

6. I am freed from this obligation if I foresee certainly that all my retractions, excuses, praises, and other means that I am ready to make use of, will have no effect, and that people will put no faith in them. Again, I am excused if I cannot make reparation without endangering my life. The same is to

be said if they to whom I have spoken ill of my neighbor are dead, or have gone away to such a distance that I cannot retract my words in their presence.

7. If I have not committed a sin before God by my uncharitable talk, as is generally the case with pious people who inadvertently let fall a word now and then that is injurious to their neighbor, I am not bound in that case to make reparation, if I cannot do so without grave inconvenience, unless I have publicly told a lie against my neighbor, in which case I am bound to retract it. Meanwhile, every one who is in the habit of speaking thoughtlessly of the faults of others, is bound under pain of sin to correct that bad habit, and to restrain his tongue.

8. I am freed from the obligation of making reparation if he whom I have slandered renounces his right and does not exact any retraction from me.

From all this it is evident that we must carefully avoid speaking ill of our neighbor, and that, if we wish to save our souls, we must restrain our tongues whenever his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation in our presence. "Take heed," is my final warning, in the words of the Holy Ghost, both to you and to myself, "take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death." Ah, keep a guard on your tongue, that it may not lead you to a mortal fall, from which you can never properly rise again! Once more, observe the golden rule of charity, to do unto others as you wish others to do unto you, and never say in the absence of others what you would not say in their presence. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF GLUTTONY.

"*Behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat.*"—Mark 8 : 2.

How these poor people put us Christians to shame! They followed Christ everywhere, over mountain and valley, in order to hear his doctrine and preaching, so that they forgot to eat and drink; for three whole days they remained with him, in spite of the hunger they suffered, until Christ, taking pity on them, relieved them by a miracle. How do we act, who profess to be followers of Christ? How often do we not depart from him and from the teaching of his Gospel for the sake of eating and drinking? Nay, how many are there who give up his friendship and the salvation of their souls, that they may eat what is forbidden at certain times, or else gratify their gluttony by excessive eating and drinking? And why do they act thus? What is the object of their eating and drinking? Is it not that they may be happy, that they may live long and enjoy themselves? Now, the very contrary of this follows on gluttony and immoderate eating and drinking, as I shall now show.

Nothing is more injurious to one's bodily health and well-being, than gluttony and an immoderate love of the pleasures of the table; for there is nothing which tends more to shorten life.

Every excess is injurious. Medicine is taken either to cure a sickness from which one is actually suffering, or to avert the

danger of it. But if the medicine is not taken in the proper quantity, if, for instance, the sick person takes three spoonfuls instead of one, of what good will the medicine be then? It will only make matters worse, and will sometimes even cause death. It is the same with eating and drinking; what medicine is to the sick body, food is to him who is in good health; it maintains his strength and his life. If we never exceeded the proper quantity, nor took food too often, we should have nothing to fear. But we act in this as we do in almost everything; we use the means that God has given us to support our lives against the end for which he has given them, and we make ourselves guilty of deliberate excess. For instance, we require a certain amount of sleep in order to rest our weary limbs and to relieve ourselves from the many thoughts and cares that oppress us during the day; we require clothing in order to maintain a suitable appearance and to protect ourselves against the cold; we stand in need of days of rest and recreation in order to renew our fervor in the service of God, and to be all the better able to fulfil the duties of our state. But the mistake is that we seldom confine ourselves to what necessity requires in those things; thus, sleep is often abused through sloth and sensuality, so that it is prolonged sometimes far into the day, and as a consequence of that the understanding is dulled, the head becomes heavy, and one is incapable of cheerfulness. Clothing is made the occasion of useless expense, pride and vanity; nay, it sometimes becomes an occasion of sin and scandal to others. The days of rest are made an excuse for squandering away one's time in idleness and useless pleasure; visits and idle talk are multiplied and prolonged, gambling and other foolish pastimes are made a daily custom, while the duties of housekeeping, the care of children and the most important business of the soul are neglected. Thus, means that are in themselves useful and necessary, are perverted into injurious and unlawful abuses, which are contrary to the end for which God instituted

those means, and that because moderation is not observed in the use of them.

So it is also with food and drink; our sensuality is not content with what merely satisfies the wants of nature; and, as the old proverb has it, it would be easy to satisfy the stomach if the eyes were not so big. If gluttony has once taken possession of a man, so that he eats and drinks to gratify his sensuality, he will hardly ever be content with merely satisfying nature; for he will either eat and drink what does not agree with him, or he will eat and drink a number of different things, or he will not observe the proper time for meals, or he will give way to greediness or to excess, and will eat more than he can digest.

It is thus that the health suffers so much and is injured instead of being preserved, while life is shortened. It is the opinion also of all medical men that most illnesses are caused by excess in eating and drinking. If a pantry in which different articles of food are stored is kept closed, it soon becomes full of worms, flies, wasps, and all kinds of vermin; so the stomach that is overloaded with different kinds of food must necessarily be filled with bad humors arising from indigestion, which lessen and destroy the natural heat of the body. Others compare the stomach to the hopper of a mill, into which the grain is poured in order to be ground; if the miller does not know his business and puts in too much at once, the corn will be ground but very imperfectly, so that it will not make good flour nor good bread. In the same way, if the stomach is overloaded with food and drink, it cannot digest properly; so that ill-health must be the consequence. A bad digestion causes evil humors in the head, and bad blood in the veins, from which nearly all diseases come. Hence the well-known saying: "Gluttony kills more than the sword."

The truth of this is proved by the experience of all ages, which shows that temperance is the best means of prolonging life: "He that is temperate shall prolong life." We know from

the Sacred Scriptures that in the first ages of the world men lived to be four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine hundred years old; now what kind of food had they in those days? Bread and water: "The chief thing for man's life is water and bread and clothing" (Ecclus. 29 : 28).

If I said anything of those holy servants of God who lived in the greatest austerity and mortification, and yet reached a ripe old age, you would say, as people generally do in such cases: Oh, they were Saints! Certainly they were Saints, but what if they were? Does holiness of life change human nature, and serve as food and drink? By no means. Paul, Anthony, Hilarion and many other hermits who lived in the desert, in holes and caves in the mountains, practising the greatest austerities and mortifications, allowing themselves only a very short sleep on the bare ground, and spending all their time in prayer and meditation, were human beings the same as we are, and like us they required food and drink to sustain life; nay, many of them were of noble birth and delicate constitution, and had been brought up in luxury; and how long did they live amidst the austerities of the desert? Hilarion went into the desert when he was fifteen years old and lived to be over eighty. Anthony lived to be a hundred and twenty years old, although he entered the desert in his youth. Paul, the first hermit, spent ninety years in the desert, and was over a hundred and thirteen when he died. During all that time these holy men were always in good health, they were never in need of a physician; they never required medicine. How did they manage that? "He that is temperate shall prolong life."

On the contrary, how does it happen that so many men in the prime of life, nay, in the very bloom of youth, are subject to catarrh, vertigo, chest-diseases, dropsy and similar complaints, from which they die prematurely? It is true that these diseases may come from other causes; but would they be so frequent if gluttony were not so common, and if food and drink

were always taken in proper quantities, for the proper end, and only as far as necessity requires to sustain health? We need not puzzle much over this; what the Holy Ghost says is and must be true: "By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate shall prolong life."

Are we not foolish mortals? There is nothing we desire more than bodily health; nothing that we wish more heartily for ourselves and our friends than a long and happy life, and yet we are so misled by gluttony that we do our very best to destroy our health and shorten our lives, as if death, which we naturally fear and dread, were a most welcome guest, whom we eagerly invite, and urge to hasten his steps in our direction! If we are ill, we spare neither trouble nor money; we annoy heaven with our prayers; we get others to pray; we have Masses said, and practise different devotions, for the sole purpose of being free from our illness and recovering our former health. If we are in good health, we do all we can by excessive eating and drinking, and by indulging our gluttony, to destroy our health. Could there be any greater folly or madness than this?

Gluttony destroys not only the health of the body, but also that of the soul. A life of luxurious indulgence does not lead to heaven, for there is no other way thither but the way of penance, the way of the Cross. Read the works of the Holy Fathers, and you will see what names they give to the fruits of gluttony. St. Thomas Aquinas asks if gluttony is worse than other sins, and he gives the following answer: The enormity of a vice may consist in the matter of the sin, and in that way gluttony is a small sin, because its matter is eating and drinking; or it may consist in the person who sins, and so, a rich man who commits a theft is more guilty than a poor man who commits the same theft, because the former had far less reason for stealing than the latter. In this way, too, the sin of gluttony is not great, because every one is in need of food and drink in order to sustain life. Or else it may consist in the effects

which follow from the sin. In this sense the sin of gluttony is certainly a great one, because it gives rise to many different kinds of sins. In a word, it is the mother of all vices.

Why, then, one might ask, has God created so many different kinds of animals, fowls and fishes, and other articles of food in such pleasing and almost endless variety, if the enjoyment of them is so hurtful to soul and body? Would it not be better to have but one or two kinds of food, and not to have so many temptations and occasions for gluttony? We see that other animals, although they may be much larger than man, yet have generally only one kind of food; some eat nothing but grass, others nothing but a certain kind of fruit, and so on, while all, without exception, drink nothing but water. On the other hand all the elements, earth, air, and water, supply food to man. Why is that? When a king or prince invites a foreign potentate to dinner, he has his table loaded with the most costly dishes and the rarest wines; for what reason? Does he expect his guest to taste all the dishes and drink of all the different kinds of wine? No, he does not expect any such thing. His only object is to show how rich he is, and at the same time to prove how he esteems his guest, since he provides him with an abundance of food, from which he may select what is most pleasing to him. So it is also with the great King of heaven. We men are placed on earth as princes and lords, so to speak, over all unreasoning creatures; he is the great Sovereign who entertains us as his guests, and in order to show his endless glory and the great love he has for men, who are made to his image, he is pleased to prepare for them a richly furnished table, and so he has created a vast quantity of different kinds of food and drink, for our enjoyment and support, not that we should use them all to excess, but that we should take as much of them as is helpful and necessary to preserve life.

Besides, as God created a most beautiful tree whose fruit was most pleasing to the taste, in order to give our first parents,

Adam and Eve, an opportunity of practising self-denial and obedience in Paradise, so he has also, with the greatest liberality, given us many kinds of food and drink, that we may find thereby an opportunity of practising virtue. Thus the poor, who cannot have abundant or nutritious food, and who see the forbidden tree only from afar, as it were, have the opportunity of practising patience and resignation to the divine will; the rich can practise mortification, self-denial, and charity toward the poor. Such is the intention of our heavenly Father.

Let our conclusion then be, to act according to this intention. You who are poor, remember the words of St. Paul: "But, having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content" (1 Tim. 6 : 8). No matter how poor you are, you must thank God that he has freed you from many temptations to gluttony and from the evils that follow that vice both for soul and body, and you must console yourselves with the promise of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill" (Matt. 5 ; 6); you will be filled with the eternal joys of heaven. You, who are rich and wealthy, never forget the advice of St. Peter: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour." Never allow yourselves to be misled by gluttony. Help Jesus Christ in his poor out of your abundance, so that they may one day receive you into eternal tabernacles. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MANIFOLD WAYS OF DEFAMING OUR NEIGHBOR'S CHARACTER, AND THE EXCUSES THAT ARE GENERALLY MADE FOR THIS SIN.

"*By their fruits you shall know them.*"—Matt. 7 : 20.

Those false prophets, who are dressed in sheeps' clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves, are like those detractors and calumniators who, with smiling countenances and every outward show of friendship, outrage Christian charity in their conversation and take away from their neighbor the best and most valuable thing that he has—that is, his good name. Beware of those false people, those ravening wolves, and pay no attention to what they say. "By their fruits you shall know them." You will find out what they are, by what they talk of; but you will be compelled almost to avoid society altogether, if you wish to keep away from those who malign their neighbor, so common is this vice, and so little do people generally make of it!

I. Injuring the good name of others is a very common sin, and it is committed generally in many different ways.

II. It is a sin that is thought little of, and that people try to excuse in different ways.

I. There are many forms of illness that the human body is subject to, which can cause it to die a natural death; but human ingenuity has also invented many ways of depriving people of life by violence, and it is still occupied in devising others. Into how many different forms are not steel and iron wrought for that purpose? Knives, stilettoes, revolvers, pistols, swords, spears, axes, javelins, are all deadly weapons with which one

can cut and pierce both near and at a distance, so as to destroy life at once. The art of gunnery can hardly be carried to greater perfection. What an enormous weight can be hurled to a distance by cannons and mortars! What fearful havoc is caused by mines, bombs, and hand-grenades and torpedoes!

Still, I know not but that slanderous tongues have nowadays still more numerous ways and instruments of depriving others of their moral life, that is, of their honor and good name. There are ten chief ways in which the fair fame of others may be attacked, and it is a rare thing to find one who does not sin in one or other of them.

1. The first is, when one falsely relates something bad and disgraceful of another. This is the worst form of defamation of another's character; because, besides the injury it inflicts on the fair fame of one's neighbor, it has also the malice of a grievous falsehood, which it is exceedingly difficult to make proper atonement for.

2. The second is, when one relates something bad of another that is true indeed, but is not yet publicly known; that is a sin that violates flagrantly the right that every one has to his good name, as long as his faults are secret.

3. The third is a common trick of slanderous tongues, and it consists in making a great crime out of a small fault, and in always causing it to appear far worse than it is in reality. For instance, a man happens to be guilty of some slight breach of trust, or to be caught in the act of committing a trifling theft; he is at once put down as a thief. He who has once been guilty of a sin of impurity is spoken of as being completely addicted to that vice. He who happens, unintentionally, to take a trifle too much drink is at once set down as a drunkard. In the same way, too, if a man lets fall a word inadvertently against his neighbor, he is considered a slanderer. All that is very wrong; there is a great difference between committing the sin once, and being in the habit of committing it. As the saying goes, one

swallow does not make a summer. He who has told one lie does not deserve to be called a liar.

4. A fourth and still more wicked manner of injuring the character of others consists in attributing wrong motives and intentions to them. These motives and intentions are supposed to be gathered with sufficient certainty from a person's least movement, from his words, his actions, his behavior, and even his dress, so that they can be made the subject of conversation. See, these evil-tongued people say, how often that young man, that young woman, that neighbor, that priest goes to that house; he or she cannot mean any good by it; we can easily imagine what goes on there. That person is very generous in giving alms to the poor; but we know why; he does not always do it for God and his soul's sake. That wife, that daughter, always appears at church in grand style; it is something else besides devotion that brings her there. I lately heard those two young people talking together, and I knew by their laughter what was going on. Did you not notice how so and so behaved when that person came into the room? I can easily guess what he was thinking of. One can know by merely looking at that man that he is not good.

5. The fifth manner of maligning one's neighbor is still more common, and it consists in not speaking directly from one's own experience against the character of others, but in relating what one has heard to their disadvantage. Thus people say: "I have heard so and so of that person on good authority; queer things are said of him; he is accused of having committed this or that crime." This is one of the most venomous kinds of defamation, because they who hear it believe that it is publicly known, and they will therefore have no hesitation in spreading it farther, so that it is the same as if one were to make known his neighbor's disgrace in every country by sending the news of it in letters through the public mails.

6. Sixthly, I injure my neighbor's character by confirming

a report that is prejudicial to him; thus, a person remarks to me that he has heard something bad about so and so, but that he does not know whether to believe it or not. Oh, yes! I answer, I, too, have frequently heard the same thing. In that way I confirm the report, and strengthen the bad opinion that he whom I am talking to has of my neighbor. Or, by contradicting and endeavoring to disparage what is said in praise of another, as people often do through hatred, envy, or pride; thus something praiseworthy is related of one who is absent; oh, I say, with evident marks of displeasure, you do not know the man as well as I do; otherwise you would not talk in that way of him, and you would soon change your opinion.

7. Seventhly, I can injure my neighbor's honor, and that grievously, by keeping silence; thus, when he is praised, I say nothing, although, as all those who are present know, I am well acquainted with him; or else I assent to what is said in such a way as to show that I believe quite the contrary; or I answer somewhat in this style: "I dare not say all I know; I do not wish to speak ill of any one; I want to leave every man to himself; God forbid that I should malign my neighbor!" In this way a deeper wound is sometimes inflicted on another's good name than if the fault of which he is guilty were told out plainly, because those who are present imagine him to be guilty of some far more grievous offence, which I do not wish to speak of.

8. I can injure my neighbor's fair fame by outward signs; for instance, certain vices are spoken of without any one being directly accused of them; I press my neighbor's foot, or his arm, or make some other sign to show that I know him to be guilty. Even during a sermon, when a certain case is explained, if I look or smile at a certain person, with such an expression as to make it evident that I am referring to him what the preacher is saying, it is the same as if I said out openly: that suits you, there is something for you. I sin in the same way by remarking after the sermon that so and so got his share

to-day; it is a pity that certain persons were not present, as they might have heard something that would do them good.

9. One can defame his neighbor even when giving good advice; thus parents sometimes say to their children: see, my son, you must not be like that other boy; people say so and so of him; nor like our neighbor, who has spent all he has on drink; nor like that other person, who is suspected of theft and has lost all credit in consequence. Be careful, my daughter, to avoid the fate of that other girl, who allowed herself to be so shamefully betrayed; do not make yourself as common as that young woman, who talks to every one. In God's name! what have those examples to do with your warning? Can you not admonish your children to avoid vice and to practise virtue without at the same time revealing the faults of others and injuring their good name?

10. Finally, the character of another may be injured even by praising or pitying him. In order to give more force to the poison wherewith slanderous tongues intend destroying their neighbor's reputation, they first commence to praise him. Thus they say: such a one is a good, sensible, and honorable man, and he is esteemed by all who know him; I cannot understand how he could have committed himself so shamefully in that matter. What a pious, holy person that is! who would think that he would have acted in that way! I am sorry for that man; if he had not that fault, he would be a splendid character. Is not that ruining a man's honor by dint of praising him? Nay, says St. Bernard, this vice is so subtle that even pious people often inflict grievous injury on their neighbor's fair fame, under the appearance of charity and a holy compassion. "You may see them," he says, "uttering slanderous words with troubled countenances." Alas! they sigh, I am sorry to hear such things of the poor man! He is one of my best friends. I wish he had not gone wrong. If he had only followed my advice! How often have I not warned him to be

more careful! In that way things are often made public that no one was aware of before, by the person who thus gives expression to his or her pity.

How many ways have been invented of injuring the character of others! And that alone should convince you that there must be a great number of people in the world who are addicted to this vice; some through wickedness, others through hatred and spite, and others, again, through sheer love of talk. In fact, there are very few who are altogether free from the vice of speaking injuriously of their neighbor; for it is such a subtle and treacherous vice that even they who have been so fortunate as to have conquered all other vices are at length caught in this last snare of the devil, defaming their neighbor, and that, too, without fear or shame. Why is this? It is because people are accustomed to look on it as no great harm to speak ill of others, so that they try in every possible way to excuse it from sin; or, rather, they do all they can to prevent themselves from being considered slanderers. But their excuses are of no avail.

II. 1. God forbid that I should slander my neighbor, or bring disgrace on him! I have certainly told some things about him that are not to his credit; but I did not speak out of hatred, anger, or envy; I had not the least wish to injure his good name; what I said came in the ordinary course of conversation, and my only object was to pass away the time. This is a very lame excuse. People must have something to talk about, and they bring under discussion a person who is absent, and tear him to pieces, as if they could find no more interesting subject of conversation than that. If you cannot talk of anything else, you should hold your tongue, and hear what the others have to say. You maintain that you had no bad intention; but what has that to do with it? In any case, you have injured your neighbor's reputation by your wicked talk. If I spoke of your faults and failings to others, would you be satis-

fied, if I told you afterwards that I had no bad intention in doing so, and that I was only helping to keep up the conversation? If a thief steals your money in your absence, and then tries to excuse himself by saying that he had not a bad intention in what he did, that he was only trying to pass away the time, and that, as the opportunity offered, he availed himself of it, would you be satisfied with that? I do not and cannot believe it. In the same way, your intention does not excuse you when you have actually injured your neighbor's honor by your talk.

2. Others allege a still more frivolous excuse, that shows them to be very ignorant; others, they say, have spoken badly of me, and no one can blame me if I pay them back in their own coin. What nonsense! Did you ever hear or read that it is lawful? Is that the teaching of St. Peter, who says "Do not render evil for evil, nor railing for railing"? (1 Pet. 3 : 9.) That man, you say, has taken away your good name. But what then? Do you regain your good name by injuring his? By no means.

3. But I am certain of what I said; I saw it with my own eyes, or I heard it from one who would not tell a lie. They who allege such an excuse betray themselves by openly declaring that they are guilty of defaming their neighbor. You say you have seen it, or heard it from a trustworthy person, and therefore that you know it to be true. Does that give you a right to reveal your neighbor's dishonor to one who has not yet heard of it? Hear what St. Thomas says: "A detractor is one who speaks not against the truth, but against his neighbor's character." It is true that he who falsely attributes a crime to his neighbor is guilty of a greater sin, called calumny; but he who makes known a private crime of his neighbor is guilty of the sin of detraction. Not only the Gospel law, but the light of reason alone, which teaches us not to do to others what we do not wish them to do to us, is sufficient to show how futile that excuse is.

4. I was not the first to speak of it; it had already been made known by others. And if you are not the first who has committed the sin of detraction, but the second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth, then, although you are not the spring from which the stream of defamation flows, yet you are the channel by which it is spread about.

5. It was already known, and had become public talk. But very often people only imagine that; they hear a thing from two or three individuals, and at once jump to the conclusion that every one knows of it. In that way you can easily make a thing public which was before known only to a few. Even if it were public talk, you still act against Christian charity by reminding others of your neighbor's dishonor. It is the great God himself who is really offended by the sin that the latter has committed; perhaps he has forgiven that sin already, because your neighbor has repented of it; and if so he will never remember it for all eternity: "If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed....I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done" (Ezech. 28 : 21, 22). Why should you, who have not been offended by your neighbor, try to keep alive the memory of his sins?

6. The sixth excuse consists in saying that they were only common, low people who were defamed. Common, low people! Their souls are just as precious, and perhaps more beautiful than yours, in the sight of God; and do you dare to take away their good name? People of lowly condition are often most sensitive in what concerns their honor; they are not blessed with riches and worldly wealth, but they do not on that account wish to part with their good name.

7. I told it to only one friend in strict confidence, and begged of him not to say a word to any one about it. Such is the excuse that many allege; but what a vain one it is! If what you did was lawful, your friend has the same liberty, and he can tell it in strict confidence to a third, the third can tell it to a

fourth, and so it goes on; for why should they have less freedom than you? The raindrops fall first on the roofs of the houses, and then into the guttering, whence they are carried into the sewer; there they unite and flow in a stream. So it is with detraction; it is carried from one to another; each one relates it in confidence; listen, my friend, he says, and I will tell you something, but you must keep it to yourself. And before you have time to look around, the secret is made public.

Let each one of us make a firm, unalterable resolution that nothing which is in the least prejudicial to our neighbor's character shall ever be mentioned by us, either in few words, or in many, or by signs or gestures; we must not inquire whether a certain thing is grievously or slightly injurious to another, nor whether a certain fault is private or public; it ought to suffice to know that to speak of such things is contrary to the charity we owe our neighbor, whom we are bound to love as ourselves.

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost.

The Vain Labor of the Avaricious.

"*There was a certain rich man.*"—Luke 16 : 1.

Even rich people may be deceived and robbed, as happened to the rich man described in to-day's Gospel, who was so unjustly treated by his own steward, who not only robbed him of his goods, but also tried to make an unjust profit out of his debtors. Therefore, money and riches are not able to make one happy, because those who strive for wealth and riches find nothing in them but vanity. For

I. An avaricious man, who seeks money and property, gains nothing in time.

II. And nothing in eternity.

I. A young prince, who was once out hunting, came to a cave in a forest, where he found the celebrated hermit Macedonius, who had spent over sixty years in this solitude. Surprised at the appearance of the old man, he asked him what he was doing in that solitude. The hermit answered: "I believe we are both of the same profession; you are a hunter, and I am a hunter also; I hunt after and seek my God, and I will not cease until I have caught him." We read of St. Cajetan: "He labored most assiduously for the salvation of his neighbor, so that he was called a hunter of souls." We read of the Emperor Domitian that he used to spend many hours in doing nothing but catching flies, and he would laugh with pleasure when he succeeded in spitting a fly on a needle, or in killing it with his hand. What a difference between these huntsmen!

We are all hunters in this life; daily we go a-hunting; but what kind of game do we seek? Good Christians, like that holy hermit, go out in search of their God; and God will say to them: "I will be thy reward exceeding great" (Gen. 15 : 1).

Zealous servants of God, who by their edifying lives and virtuous example, by bringing up their children in a holy manner, by avoiding scandal, by fraternal correction and exhortation of the wicked, by visiting the sick and helping the poor, seek to bring others to heaven with them, happy hunters are they! They hunt souls, like Cajetan; they will find what they desire, and their glory in heaven will be increased by the souls they convert.

Vain worldlings, who are busied every day with a hundred cares for the sake of some temporal gain or some momentary pleasure, meanwhile forgetting their souls as completely as if they had none, what do they hunt? Like Domitian, they hunt

flies, which escape out of their hands, and even when they have caught one they have nothing but a worthless insect.

1. There are three classes of those who are engaged in the pursuit of temporal riches; for they are either prodigal with their money, or avaricious, or moderate. None of the three classes catch anything but worthless flies, especially when money is the end and object of their labor. It is clear enough that the prodigal gain nothing, for they squander away on dress or luxurious living, or in some other foolish way, the money they made by their labor.

2. Those who use their riches in moderation, what do they gain? Besides their gold, which, after all, is only a piece of metal, they gain many cares and anxieties, much disquiet and trouble, much labor and fatigue, for they have to run hither and thither, either to get riches, or to keep them, or to increase them. Therefore our Lord compared riches to thorns: he who wishes to pluck the rose must not be astonished if the thorns prick him. You may be rolling in wealth, but you have gained nothing but food and clothing; a few times a day you can eat and drink your fill, that is all. You have a grand house, you may have three or four of them; now, tell me the truth, are you therefore able to take up more room than before? Certainly not; you are not able to fill up even one room in your house. Your coffers may be filled with gold; are you, then, in need of more food and drink than before? Certainly not. "What doth it profit the owner but that he seeth the riches with his eyes?" (Eccles. 5 : 10) for it is only the least part of his gold that he can make use of; the greater part he can only look at and admire. Even the richest kings and princes, with all their pomp and wealth, can have nothing more than food, clothing, and lodging; and therefore an ordinary citizen, who has only food, clothing, and lodging, and who desires nothing else, is far happier and more contented than a Crœsus. Why, then, should we have such an inordinate desire to increase our wealth

if our nature is content with so little? Why should I trouble myself about things that I can never use or enjoy?

3. Let us now consider the third class, namely, the avaricious; that is, those who seek money, and live parsimoniously, and do all they can to increase their stock, not because they intend to make use of it, but solely that they may become rich; they are those who love money for its own sake. This greed of gain is the most foolish of passions, because it brings no advantage or profit to him who is subject to it. St. Paul calls it, "a serving of idols" (Ephes. 5 : 5). And why? There is nothing more foolish than to adore false gods. This folly is committed by the avaricious man, who loves his money and keeps it for its own sake; for he loves a thing that is not worthy of love, and profits him nothing. The whole value and charm of money consists only in the use of it, in the fact that I can give it in exchange for food, clothing, lodging, and other necessaries or pleasures of life. In former times, as we learn from history, money was coined out of the hides of oxen, through want of metals or the skill required to work them. Were people any worse off then than we are now? No; we are neither better off nor richer because we have gold and silver coin to buy the necessaries of life with; the same things might have been had formerly for copper money. We pay ten cents or more now for what would then have cost but one cent, and where I must now spend five dollars, I should have had then to spend but one. Money is like food: if I cannot enjoy the food, what good is it to me? What good is money to me if I cannot or will not make use of it? I certainly cannot eat it. Still, there is this difference between money and food, that by the use and enjoyment of the food I increase my bodily health and strength, while the good of money consists in my giving it away to others. If I had a bag full of gold in my room, and were lawful owner of it, but were forbidden to give any of it away, of what use would it be to me unless merely to look at?

No one makes less use of money than the miser; he will not and cannot part with it; there is no one who eats, drinks, and lives more miserably; he would rather starve than spend a penny of his hidden treasures; he would rather cut off his hand than give away any of his gold for a lawful pleasure or enjoyment; his only care is how to increase his store. "The eye of the covetous man is insatiable; he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up" (Ecclus. 14 : 9). The more he has, the more he desires. In the other desires of the senses one can easily find sufficient satisfaction; when I have looked at a beautiful picture an hour or so, I get tired of it and go away. No matter how fine music may be, if we hear too much of it our ears grow wearied. Food and drink, no matter how good they are, cause disgust when we have had our fill of them. But the insatiable miser is never satisfied. Experience generally teaches that the less one's income is the more ready he is in giving, and the more willing to procure for himself lawful pleasures: a thing that a rich miser would not dream of doing. The miser is as poor as a beggar, in the midst of his wealth.

The miser is even worse off than a beggar; for the beggar, when he gets a little money, spends it with joy to purchase what he is in need of; but the miser, when he is forced to spend a trifle for the bare necessaries of life, does it as unwillingly as if it was his heart's blood he was depriving himself of. Thus the use of his riches causes him more trouble and anxiety than pleasure and satisfaction; he possesses wealth, but has nothing from it; he is frightened at the bare idea of having to spend money to keep himself from starving. He is annoyed at seeing any one come into his house, lest he should have to spend anything on him. If his clothes show signs of old age, he shudders at the thought of having to get new ones. If his wife or one of his children gets sick, he is almost beside himself, not with pity, but through fear of having to pay for medicines.

Besides that, he draws down on himself the hatred and scorn of others; he is always ridiculed; his neighbors dislike him, his friends are ashamed of him and avoid him; the poor and needy curse him; tradesmen and laborers are unwilling to work for him, because they have just reason for suspecting that he will not pay them, or that he will keep them waiting a long time for payment; his servants cannot bear him, because he feeds them so badly; nay, he is even hateful sometimes to his own wife and children, because they do not get enough from him to be able to dress according to their position. In nearly all comedies a miser is brought on the stage to excite the laughter of the audience; no one pities his misfortunes, they are rather a source of enjoyment. Thieves hardly think it a sin to steal from him, and sometimes they do so, not for the sake of what they can carry off, but to vex the miser. He is generally compared to a swine, that is of no good to any one till it is dead. But if the avaricious man gains nothing in time, he gains far less for his soul in eternity.

II. The foolish miser knows well that he will not be able to take a single penny with him into the next world; he must acknowledge, with St. Paul: "We brought nothing into this world, and certainly we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6 : 7). The huntsmen go out with their dogs; they look around for game most eagerly, and if they see a hare jumping out of a bush, what a noise they make! They run here and there, and set the dogs after the hare with loud cries; but when the dogs have caught it they take it from them at once. The same thing happens to the avaricious. When they have got what they want, very often death comes and cries out to them to leave it. Where is my money? he asks. You must leave it, answers death. Where are my houses and lands, and my costly furniture? You must leave them. Away with you at once, poor and naked, into eternity! Everything you have you

must leave to others, whether you wish it or not; to others, who will perhaps squander it away most recklessly, who will not even thank you for it, nor say an Our Father for your soul, because you gave them nothing during your life.

Is it possible that we should plague and torment ourselves about those perishable goods, which are worth nothing in time, nothing at all in eternity? And yet nearly every one is most eager in pursuit of them. If people employed for God and heaven the fourth, nay, even the tenth, part of the labor and trouble they give themselves to amass worldly wealth, they would become great Saints in heaven. How much is done and suffered daily for the sake of money, and how little is done in a whole year for God and heaven! Shout from the pulpit until you are hoarse, exhort the people to come to church on Sundays and holydays, to hear the word of God and do something for their souls, and you will see that many Catholics can find a hundred excuses: the church is too far away, the weather is too severe, others have something to do at home. Preach to them of fasting, alms-giving, mortification of the senses, Christian meekness and humility, to which the law of Christ binds every one, and they will find a hundred excuses to dispense themselves: fasting is bad for their health, alms-giving they cannot afford, they are too delicate to practise mortification. So that it is too difficult and almost impossible to do anything for God and one's soul. Gold! Oh, what a far greater power has it over the hearts of men! No mortification is too great, no labor too heavy, no humiliation too degrading, no way too rough, no weather too severe, no time too precious, nothing so troublesome as to frighten away one who has a hope of gaining gold! Ask one to expose himself to a thousand dangers, either on the stormy sea, or on land amongst robbers and murderers, and you will find enough who are only too willing to do so! They will do for the love of gold what they will not do for the love of God.

How unwisely we act, although the day is appointed for us to die; behold, the day and the hour will come when death will take away all you have; how unwise to strain every power of soul and body to heap up riches, and to forget the interests of the soul! Is it not foolish to plague ourselves so much in the pursuit of that which cannot content us when we have it, and to neglect the only good that is able to satisfy us fully? Poor ye are, oh, rich, if you have lost your God! Woe to you that are rich if your hearts are fixed on riches and temporal goods. Rich are ye, oh, poor, if in your poverty you have gained God alone; you shall be rich enough for time and eternity, for God will be your reward exceeding great. Amen.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE CARELESSNESS OF THE AVARICIOUS IN NEGLECTING GOD DURING LIFE.

"*And entering into the temple, he began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought.*"—Luke 19 : 45.

So far are men carried away by the desire of money and temporal riches that they do not hesitate to place the honor of God in the background, and profane the buildings consecrated to him, as we read in to-day's Gospel of the buyers and sellers who turned the temple of the Lord into a public market-place, so that even the meek Jesus was forced to be angry with them and to drive them away with scourges. On last Sunday I said and proved to you that the avaricious man, with all his labor and trouble, gains nothing for time and eternity; but I have not said near enough, for he loses everything in time and in eternity, inasmuch as he neglects God and all that belongs to God.

I. The avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting the good that he ought to do.

II. He neglects God by doing the evil to which his desires lead him.

I. To please God it is indispensably necessary for us to acknowledge him as our last end, and as the centre of our happiness, who alone can fully and perfectly satisfy all the desires of our hearts; necessary to avoid everything that could keep us away from him, and to do all that can lead us to him. We must love him constantly with all our heart and soul, so that every thought, desire, word and action of ours must be directed to him. That is the only business that we have to perform in this short and uncertain life here below; whatever cannot be directed to this business by a good intention is not only useless, but culpable and unlawful.

Now, an avaricious man who works for temporal goods with an inordinate desire and care, does none of those things, and it is impossible for him to fulfil properly the duties which Jesus Christ himself has imposed upon us, because it is impossible to serve two masters, and because the love of money is utterly incompatible with the love of God; "you cannot serve God and Mammon" (Luke 16 : 13). Besides, on what does the avaricious man set his heart and his affections? "Where thy treasure is," says Christ, " there is thy heart also" (Matt. 6 : 21). Now, money and property are a treasure. What is the end of all his actions? His money and property. In what does he place his happiness? Where does he seek his rest and pleasure? In his money and property. Of what does he think most? What does he watch most carefully? His money and property.

How is it possible for such a man to give his heart, and his whole heart, to God? It is impossible. To hear Mass devoutly, to hear the Word of God in sermons, so that one may

be encouraged to love heavenly things and to despise earthly goods by the inward working of the Holy Ghost, to go to confession and holy Communion every month, or oftener, to make once a year a more careful examination of conscience, so as to keep one's account with God in good order, now and then to read a spiritual book, or the lives of the Saints, to make a daily examen of conscience every evening before retiring to rest; these and similar exercises of a Christian life are unknown to the avaricious man. They do not suit his fancy; he cannot afford to practise them. They will not help me to earn my bread, he says.

If any one of you is so much taken up with business cares that he does not attend to God and to his soul, should I say to him: Alas, poor, unfortunate man, you are a slave to greed of gain and an inordinate desire of earthly things! Even though you seek no unjust profit, your very mode of life is not justified before God; you are subject to a disgraceful avarice, and before long you shall hear the words: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12 : 20.) Yes, whose shall they be? I ask. They shall be for my children and heirs, you think. In that case, you work for others and forget your soul! And it is so in reality. Ask some gray-haired old grandfather for whom does he labor. For my children, he will say. And for whom does his married son labor? The latter will answer, for my children. And for whom do they work? For their children in turn. Alas, what folly and blindness! no one works for himself and his soul. The avaricious are like Domitian, who dreamt one night that he had on his shoulders a heavy, but, at the same time, an agreeable burden; the thought that a hump of gold had grown on his back, whereat he was greatly rejoiced. A foolish joy, for he had much more reason to grieve at a deformity that would make him contemptible in the sight of men. If he could have really had such a hump, he

would have been obliged to carry it about with great labor, without ever deriving the least advantage from it. How many there are who make a golden hump for themselves! They heap up riches, but on their backs; not for themselves, but for their children and descendants. No one works for God and for heaven. No; avarice will not tolerate that kind of labor, when once it gets hold of the heart. Heaven is nothing more to an avaricious man than it is to a beast, which can see it as long as there is light; his soul is no more to him than to a dumb beast; he neglects it as if it were to perish with the body.

His god is money, and therefore St. Paul compares avarice to idolatry. When the prophet Osee, during the Babylonian captivity, was preaching to the Jews and exhorting them to adore the true God, Ephraim said to him: "I will not adore the God of whom you speak." And why? "Because I am become rich; I have found me an idol" (Osee 12 : 8). The avaricious man says the same thing by his acts: I have found me an idol; what is God to me? I have neither time nor inclination to serve him; I have my God at home in my coffers. If, now and then, he does something to serve the true God, he does it only for the sake of money and temporal gain. If he had nothing to fear or to hope from God, he would never think of him. He does not seek money for God's sake, but he seeks God for money's sake.

And besides loses all pity for the poor. God, as the common Father of all, has given to some an abundance of worldly wealth, that they may help the poor and needy; that is the last thing the avaricious man thinks of; it is easier to get blood from a stone than an alms from a miser, although he has more money than he knows what to do with. Divine Providence has given to some a larger share of temporal goods, to others a lesser share, and to others none at all, so that men might stand in need of each other, and by helping each other all go to heaven; the poor man by his patience and resignation to the will of God;

the rich man by alms-deeds and the works of Christian charity. Now, if there is no doubt that the rich are bound under pain of sin to help the poor out of their superfluous wealth, how much greater is not the obligation of a rich man who is a miser? For, since he spends less than he might, his store increases daily, and with it the obligation of alms-giving. But there is little use in reminding him of his duty. Avarice has taken from the miser's heart all human feeling and natural pity, and, much more than that, it has taken away all supernatural virtue, all Christian charity and mercy. Thus the avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting the good he is bound to do.

II. But he incurs a still greater responsibility before God, by doing the evil to which his avarice leads him. The Sacred Scripture says: "Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man." "There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale, because, while he liveth he hath cast away his bowels" (Eccles. 10 : 9, 10). The miser is the most unjust and the most impious of all. I find that this vice was in the world in the time of our forefather Adam, for the first vice that showed itself in Cain was greed and the love of worldly goods, since he kept the best fruits for himself and offered the worst to God. His envy, jealousy, hatred and murder of his brother were all children of avarice. It was through avarice that king Jeroboam introduced idolatry into the kingdom of Israel; it was the cause of the rebellion and murmuring against God of the Israelites in the desert, for they clamored for meat to eat: "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Num. 11 : 4) although they had sheep and cattle in abundance, which they were unwilling to slaughter through avarice. St. Paul says of avarice: "The desire of money is the root of all evil; which some, coveting, have erred from the faith" (1 Tim. 6 : 10). There is no sin so great and horrible which an avaricious man is not ready to commit for the sake of money. The

Scribes and Pharisees wanted some one to deliver Jesus Christ into their hands; they had only to promise a sum of money, and the traitor Judas immediately offered himself; he was blinded and corrupted by a few pieces of silver. The high-priests, who wished to nail the Son of God to a Cross, were ready to spend their money, and they found soldiers and Jews enough who were willing to do the work of the executioner! The soldiers come back from the grave of Christ, filled with consternation, saying: We have seen that he whom you crucified has really risen from the dead, and as eye-witnesses we can publish the fact throughout the whole city of Jerusalem, to your great shame and confusion; what are you going to do? Out with your money at once; there is nothing better! Bribe the soldiers, and they will not only hold their tongues, but they will even spread a false report that the disciples of Christ came and took away his body during the night while they were asleep. So great is the power of money. The devil himself, after having vainly tempted our Lord to gluttony and ambition, at last tried to seduce him by the love of gold; if he is a mere man, thought the tempter, he will have to succumb to this; and so he took our Blessed Lord to the top of a mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory, and said to him: "All these will I give thee if, falling down, thou wilt adore me!" (Matt. 4 : 9.) Clearly the devil did not yet know that he had to do with God, otherwise he would not have made such a promise, nor would he have dared to try a temptation of this kind.

If he were to show a purse of gold nowadays to many Christians, and offer it to them, oh, how many knees would bend in adoration of him! Faith, honor, fidelity, conscience, soul, heaven, God himself, all are too light when weighed against a sum of money! The desire of money is the root of all evil; nay, it is the means that the most vicious make use of to accomplish their sinful and wicked undertakings. The proud man uses it to

make himself great in the eyes of the world and to oppress others; the sensual and unchaste man to satisfy his brutal lusts and his sensuality; the vindictive man to destroy his enemy; the glutton to satisfy his appetite; all of them require money to carry out their wicked intentions.

I conclude with the words of David: "If riches abound, set not your heart upon them" (Ps. 41 : 11). I do not say that you must throw away your wealth, but that you must not fix your heart and desires on it. It is not an evil thing in itself to possess riches; many of the greatest friends of God have been rich in this life; the whole evil consists in the bad use and inordinate love of it. It is one thing to keep poison in a closed vessel, and another to take it into one's mouth and swallow it. "Woe to the rich," not because they possess money and lands, but because they allow them to possess their hearts. You who are moderately rich, remember the words of St. Paul: "Having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content." If we have enough to procure daily bread for ourselves and those belonging to us, let us be content therewith, and not desire great riches. Finally, you who are poor, remember that God has so ordained for you, and that he gave the same portion on earth to his beloved Son, who came into this world poor, lived poor, and died poor, that he might make us rich in heaven. Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE UNHAPPY DEATH OF THE AVARICIOUS.

"O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust."—Luke 11 : 18.

The Pharisee had good reason to thank God that he was not addicted to extortion and injustice; if he had only done so with real, humble gratitude to God. What a great thing it would be for us if we could all say of ourselves, with truth and Christian humility: Thank God! I am not given to extortion and injustice. Avarice and injustice are not many degrees removed from each other; for the former is generally the root of the latter, because the avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting good and doing evil, and committing all kinds of sin. But I have now to add something far more terrible.

I. The avaricious man dies without true repentance.
II. He generally dies without restitution.

I. As we live, so shall we die; a good life is followed by a happy death; a bad life by an unhappy death; therefore, since the avaricious man neglects God during life, he will also neglect him at the hour of death. It is true that such is the case with all wicked men who live bad lives and put off repentance till the hour of death, for, as a general rule, they die without true sorrow for their sins; still, it is especially the case with the avaricious. Other vicious habits disappear with age; for one either loses all taste for them since he has found that they cannot content him, or else the bodily strength required to indulge in them is wanting. Avarice, alone, does not yield to the influence of years or old age; on the contrary, it increases more and more,

and as years go on it strikes deeper root. As a matter of experience, we see that old people are the most avaricious. No matter how wicked a man may be who is given to other vices, when he sees his last hour approaching he tries to make peace with God; but it would be a miracle if a miser, whose god was money, should be converted.

No doubt he will confess his other sins and receive holy Communion; but what devotion can he have, or love of God, whom he still loves less than his money? What kind of sorrow can he have for his inordinate and sinful greed of riches, when his greatest and only grief is that he must now leave his beloved money for ever? There is no use in speaking to him of the eternal treasures and joys of heaven; that is a happiness for which he never had any desire, and which he would now willingly renounce if he could only remain on earth with his treasures. No use in speaking to him of the eternal pains of hell; his heart has no room for any such salutary thought, because it is filled with the love of gold, and is insensible to all supernatural ideas. What means had not Jesus, who is the Master of hearts, employed to turn Judas from his wicked design? Frequently, in the presence of his other Apostles, he had had recourse both to exhortation and example to inspire him with contempt for earthly things; he promised heaven to him: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5 : 3); he spoke of the exceeding great reward which shall be given to those who leave all things for his sake: "And every one that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother,. . . .or lands. . . .shall receive a hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting" (Matt. 19 : 29). He told him of hell and its eternal misery, when he warned him at the Last Supper: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed; it were better for him if that man had not been born" (Matt. 26 : 24). He even went down on his knees, washed and dried his feet. Certainly a heart of stone might have been soft-

ened then. But Judas remained as obdurate as ever; the thirty pieces of silver which had been promised him had taken possession of his heart, and for their sake he was quite willing to renounce his apostleship and to deliver Jesus, whom he knew to be the Son of God, to his enemies and murderers.

With a few words Jesus humbled the pride of James and John when they asked for the highest place in his kingdom: "You know not what you ask" (Matt. 20 : 22). A single look was enough to fill Peter with sorrow and contrition for having denied him. To cure the unbelief of Thomas, he merely allowed him to touch his wounds. The Samaritan woman was living in impurity, but a short conversation with Christ converted her. Magdalen was a public sinner, possessed by seven devils, but her heart was touched by a few words of the Saviour, and she was converted. Avarice alone was the obstinate vice that he could not cure, in spite of all the means he adopted; when all the people who heard him preach believed in him and followed him, the covetous Pharisees alone stood aloof, deriding him. For the same reason he failed to touch the heart of Judas, and could not bring him to repentance. Even while the act of treachery was being accomplished he took pity on the traitor, and said to him, in order to encourage him to repent: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" (Matt. 26 : 50.) But all in vain. Avarice brought the traitor so far that at last he hanged himself in despair. How fruitless it is to preach penace to the avaricious, when even God has not succeeded in converting them! And why? Because they have lost their hearts, and the devil possesses them. And so it is in reality; the avaricious have no heart either for themselves or God. You have heard, doubtless, of that rich miser who died suddenly; when his body was opened he was found to be without a heart; the bystanders were astonished, and wondered what sort of an illness it was that had thus eaten away his heart; but the mystery was soon cleared up. When the heir opened the chest in which the dead

man used to keep his money, he saw the heart of the unhappy man in the claws of a devil, who, in the appearance of a small but terrible dragon, sat on the heap of gold, and uttered the following words: "This gold and silver is the price of the heart which your friend sold me, so that it is mine by right." Having frequently repeated the words, "the heart is mine, the heart is mine," the dragon flew away, taking the heart with him to hell. Thus the avaricious man neglects God in the hour of death, since, generally speaking, he dies without true sorrow for his sins, even if he has not been guilty of any injustice. How much more is he not apt to neglect God, after having committed many acts of injustice to which he was impelled by greed of gain? Oh, surely in such a case there is no hope of a true conversion, since he dies without making restitution.

II. It is absolutely necessary to restore what one possesses unjustly when one can restore it to its lawful owner, no matter how one has come by it; and without such restitution there is no pardon for sin, no hope of heaven. But what a difficult and unusual thing it is for men to make restitution! In the Holy Scriptures we find hardly any example of restitution having been actually made, except in the case of Judas, who brought back the thirty pieces of silver; but even this restitution did not come from a love of justice; it was an act of despair on the part of one who had made up his mind to hang himself, and not to try to save his soul. The elder Tobias wished to give back the kid that he erroneously thought to be stolen. Zaccheus said to Christ: "If I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19 : 8.) But the Gospel does not say that he wronged any one. Humanly speaking, it is impossible for an unjust and avaricious man, who is at the point of death, to make restitution. For how can he remember all the unjust tricks he has had recourse to in his business, and how, when, where, and whom he has wronged? Can he say how much he

has unjustly taken from others? "The men of riches," says the Psalmist, "have found nothing in their hands" (Ps. 75 : 6), or "they have not found their hands." Whenever there is question of keeping or receiving, the avaricious find their hands easily enough; but they have no hands to give back or to make restitution. Ill-gotten goods are like the bait which conceals the hook; a hungry fish swallows the bait, and loses its life in consequence, for either it is hauled into the boat, or else it breaks the line, and goes off with the hook in its mouth, from which it will never be able to free itself. The avaricious man who has ill-gotten goods, suffers from a similar misfortune: he has swallowed, with the bait, a hook which will cause him eternal death. He is exhorted to give back what he has wrongfully acquired, to reject what he has swallowed; but that is what he refuses to do, until the Almighy God takes it from him violently by death.

But, it may be objected, restitution cannot be such a difficult thing for one who stands face to face with death. Why should he desire to keep what he cannot use? True, there is a good deal in that remark; but it does not apply to deep-seated avarice. If the avaricious man cannot enjoy his wealth himself, he still clings to the idea of leaving it to his heirs, in whose persons he imagines he can continue to live. This is the extreme of folly, into which a man is hurried by love of money. He takes great care that others should live well after he is gone; but he does not think of the unhappy death that is in store for him. Christ says: "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15 : 13). Does it not seem that the avaricious man has a still greater love, or, rather, madness, since he gives up for his friends, not the life of the body, but that of the immortal soul, by being ready to sacrifice his hopes of heaven and to condemn himself to hell rather than impoverish them by making restitution of what he has unjustly acquired?

It is related of a certain rich man, who, a few hours before his death, sent for a notary to make his will. When the notary arrived he said to him: Sit down and write as I shall dictate to you; this is my last will; after my death I bequeath my body to the earth, from which it came, but my soul I give to the devil, to whom it belongs. All the bystanders were horror-stricken at this. Go on, said the dying man; write as I tell you; I give my soul to the devil, and also, as far as I can, I give him the souls of my wife and children. My soul I give to him, because I have made a good deal here and there in my business that does not of right belong to me; my wife's soul, because she has made me commit many acts of injustice in order to support her extravagance; and the souls of my children, because I neither can nor will make restitution, so as not to leave them poor. Having said these words, he breathed his last.

The accursed greed of gold forces men to sacrifice heaven, their souls and their God for all eternity. Now you understand that terrible woe that the meek Saviour threatens to those rich men whose hearts are attached to their wealth: "Woe to you that are rich." The vain world thinks you fortunate: men, blinded by the glitter of your wealth, look upon you with envy, and wish they were like you; but woe to you! And why? Not only because it costs you so much labor and trouble to gain wealth, so much care to preserve it, so much fear and anxiety lest the least accident should deprive you of it; so that with all your riches your lives are full of torment and uneasiness. Woe to you. And why? Not only because your gold cannot make you contented and happy, since the desire of it increases every day, and so keeps you constantly on the rack, without ever giving you time to enjoy it. Woe to you. And why? Not merely because your avarice prevents you from using and enjoying your wealth, so that you live as miserably as if you had nothing. Woe to you. And why? Not only because death will compel you to relinquish your treasures, as the hunter

compels the dog to give up the game it has seized; so that you must go into eternity without being able to bring with you a single farthing of the money you loved so much. But, woe to you, especially, because even at the hour of death you refuse to make due restitution, and die without true repentance, and thus are lost forever! Woe to you!

I am afraid that there are very few who derive any profit from this sermon, because people either refuse to acknowledge that they are avaricious, although they are in reality infected with that vice, or else they maintain that very few are addicted to it. The poor, and those of the middle class, will not see much in this sermon to apply to themselves. They will think that what I have said is for the rich alone. We have not much money, they will say; we have no large revenues, and therefore we have not the chance of being avaricious. Oh, Christians! you make a mistake; I have not said that avarice consists in possessing much wealth, but in an inordinate desire and love of money and worldly goods; a love which the poorest as well as the richest may have. The love of money is so general that it may be found in the midst of poverty and want; while poverty of spirit is to be seen in the midst of wealth. What better are you for being poor outwardly, if you are inwardly consumed with a thirst for money? If, in your poverty, or mediocrity, you are dissatisfied with the will of God and murmur because he has not given you more of the goods of this world; if you are always busy with plans and contrivances to become rich; if you envy others because they have more than you; if you are as ready to lie and swear falsely for a dollar as another is for a thousand dollars; if you are always on the watch to seize hold of everything you can find, whether you have a right to it or not—how will your poverty help you to heaven in that case? You are rich in spirit, although poor in reality; you are avaricious at heart, although you have no money.

"Beware of all covetousness" (Luke 12 : 15); do not allow

yourselves to be possessed by greed of gold. You who are rich, make friends to yourselves with your riches, that they may hereafter receive you into heaven; remember that God has lent much to you that you may share it with his poor servants; nor can you make a better use of your money than to place it in their hands, that they may forward it on to eternity for you. You who are poor, console yourselves: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures without content" (Prov. 15 : 16), which cannot bring happiness. "Better is a dry morsel with joy, than a house full of victims with strife" (Prov. 17 : 1); it is better to have but a dry crust, and to be at peace with God, than to sit at a well supplied table with a heart filled with care. Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON UNCHARITABLE LISTENERS.

"*He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.*"—Mark 7 : 37.

There are not a few Christians whose souls would profit much if their bodily tongues were dumb and their bodily ears deaf, so many sins do they commit by their senses of speech and hearing. Would it not be better for certain talkative people to be altogether dumb than to injure or destroy their neighbor's honor and good name by their wicked tongues? Would it not be better for those curious ears to be completely deaf than to listen with pleasure to backbiting, detraction and scandal? Certainly it would be much better, if it were God's holy will, for some men to lose both tongue and ears than to lose their souls. I have already said enough of those who sin in

this exceedingly dangerous matter by talking against their neighbors (God grant that what I have said may help them to amendment in this respect!) They who listen to such uncharitable talk must now have their instruction, for they must know

I. Whether, and how they commit sin; and

II. How they ought to behave under such circumstances.

I. According to the old saying, the receiver makes the thief. If there were none willing to buy stolen goods no one would steal or offer ill-gotten goods for sale. In like manner, if no one were willing to listen to uncharitable talk, slanderous tongues would soon be reduced to silence, and in a short time an end would be put to this widely-prevalent and detestable vice. But why is this vice so universal among men? Mainly because the majority of people are willing to encourage it by listening to the detractor or backbiter.

Few have the courage, the zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls which would prompt them to put a stop to an uncharitable discourse, if commenced in their presence. Few are brave enough to withdraw from, or at least to testify their displeasure at, uncharitable conversation, much less to say out boldly: "If you have anything praiseworthy to tell me of this absent person, I will listen to you with pleasure; but I do not want to hear anything prejudicial to my neighbor's honor and good name." Or else: "What is it to me that So and So has acted in that way, that that man is a usurer, that servant stupid, that merchant unjust, that that woman is given to idleness, that young girl to vanity, that young man to drunkenness? We have not to look after the shortcomings of others, but our own, for which alone we shall be held responsible at the judgment-seat of God."

The malice of the sin committed by those who listen deliberately to uncharitable talk consists in this, that they give the slanderer the occasion of committing sin, instead of prevent-

ing him from offending God. Two devils are present in every company where a conversation is carried on about the faults and failings of others. The detractor (who speaks) has a devil in his mouth; the listener has a devil in his ears. Both parties commit sin, but which of them commits the greater sin? The first sins by injuring his neighbor's honor and good name in the estimation of the listener; the latter sins because he gives the former occasion to continue the uncharitable conversation. Such, in effect, was the answer once given by a sensible man to a certain tale-bearer, who came and told him that his enemy had said something against him. "If my enemy," said he, "had not found in you a ready listener, he would not have ventured to make so free with my good name; therefore, if either of you has committed sin by that conversation, it is you, certainly, who are most to blame for it!"

Now, if this is true of all those who listen to such conversation with pleasure, how grievously do they not sin who, by asking questions, directly furnish others with the occasion of speaking against their neighbor! How grievous the sin must be that is committed by those inquisitive people who are always meddling with the affairs of others, and who never rest until they find out everything that is going on. There are certain hunting dogs whose only business is to unearth the game; this done, they bark as a signal to the huntsman, who immediately comes and shoots the animal or bird, as it may chance to be. They who are so fond of prying into their neighbor's faults and defects are like these dogs. They ask all kinds of questions and fish for information in every possible way, until they find out what goes on in that house, that family, that street, or between those friends and relatives; then they go howling around, exposing their "find" to all who will listen to them. If they hear anything good and praiseworthy of another, they pay no attention to it. It is not that they are looking for. There are certain plants, such as broom corn, that

are good for nothing but to make brooms of. The same may be said of these prying, gossiping people. They are good for nothing but to sweep up filth and impurities; they are brooms to gather scandal from their neighbor's failings and faults. Thus, for instance, they say in the course of conversation: "There is a queer report about So and So; have you heard anything about it? I wonder what it can be?" Or, if any one inadvertently lets fall a hint against his neighbor's character, they are not satisfied until they have found out the whole affair. "Go on," they say; "tell me all about it; you need not be afraid that I will speak of it; I will tell you afterwards why I am so anxious to hear it."

The worst of this class are those meddlesome persons who, under guise of apparent friendship, ask servants and little children all kinds of questions about what goes on at home. "How are you getting on?" they say; "are you satisfied with your situation? Have you not a very good master or mistress? Who was at your house yesterday? What was he doing there?" and so on, until the unsuspecting child or the discontented servant tells them everything they wish to know. What do I gain by knowing that my neighbor is a bad man? Is it not, on the contrary, a great evil and loss to me to have found that out? If I have gained my knowledge by prying inquiries, I have caused those whom I have questioned to commit sin, and I have committed sin myself by my curiosity, because, as it is unlawful to make known the private faults of another, so also it is sinful to try to find out what those faults are. The servant or the child commits a mortal sin against charity and justice by relating anything that is apt to bring grievous dishonor on the family, and of course I commit a much more grievous sin by being the occasion of their offending God.

Therefore, hedge in your ears with thorns, and hear not a wicked tongue. You should not listen to it, much less should you give it occasion to speak. But, you will ask, who can

avoid hearing uncharitable talk? He who wishes to do that would have to shut himself up in his room and never go out. In spite of ourselves we are often obliged to listen to things that are injurious to our neighbor's character, and there is not a chance of making uncharitable people hold their tongues. What, then, it to be done under such circumstances, so as not to sin against God or my neighbor?

II. I acknowledge that, since it is a common thing in the world to talk about the faults and failings of others, no matter how careful we are we can hardly avoid hearing some talk of that kind. That is why I said in the first place that I could wish that we were often deprived of hearing for a time. But my wish is in vain; as long as we have ears, and they are in a healthy state, so long must we hear whatever sound is made, whatever words are pronounced aloud near us.

What, then, are we to do when an uncharitable conversation is commenced in our presence against our will? The Holy Ghost tells us: "Hedge in thy ears with thorns." By thorns, which pierce and wound, are here meant those fraternal admonitions, those reproofs, which we should administer to detractors or backbiters, in order that they may cease talking uncharitably, and that we may have no part in their sin.

If he who speaks against his neighbor's character is subject to you, then there is no doubt that you are bound to use the authority that God has given you and to command the detractor to hold his tongue. This obligation especially concerns fathers and mothers who hear their children or servants speaking ill of others, because they are bound in conscience to look after the spiritual welfare of the members of their household.

But if the detractor is not subject to you, although he is of lower condition than you, the law of fraternal correction binds you; but you must administer the reproof in a friendly and courteous manner. For instance, you might say: "Let us talk of

something else. I know you have no bad intention, still there is always danger in speaking of such things, as one is apt to say what he will be sorry for afterwards."

If the detractor is equal to you in condition, you are not always bound to correct him in that manner; but you must try to put a stop to the conversation in such a manner as not to offend him. Excuse the person spoken of, and say: "At all events, he is an honorable man," or: "she is a respectable lady; we must not believe everything that people say. There is so much of that kind of talk going about that one hardly knows whether it be true or not. If everything that people say were true, we should be all thieves and rogues." Or say: "We have all our faults; what is the use of talking of those of others?"

Finally, if the detractor is of a higher position than your own, what are you to do? It would hardly do for you to admonish or correct him, and if you try to interrupt the conversation, you must do it very cautiously and delicately, otherwise that plan will not be successful. Naturalists tell us that the dolphin hears, although he seems to have no means of hearing, as he has no ears. That is just what one must do when his superior commences to talk uncharitably of others. He must not show by his outward behavior or by the least sign or word, or by laughing or smiling, that he takes pleasure in such conversation. He must keep still and silent and serious, so as to let every one see that it is very displeasing to him. "The north wind driveth away rain, so doth a sad countenance a backbiting tongue." If you listen to a detractor with a serious, sad countenance, he will learn not to be too ready to say what is not heard with pleasure; for, as no one goes willingly into a house in which he knows he is not welcome, so no one will care about protracting a conversation that he knows is displeasing to those who listen. St. Augustine was such an enemy to all uncharitable discourses that he caused a tablet, with the following inscription, to be inserted in the wall over his table, so that all

might be able to see it: "He that takes pleasure in speaking ill of the absent, must know that he dare not present himself at this table." It happened once that several bishops were at table with St. Augustine, when some of them forgot the inscription on the tablet and began to speak rather freely of the absent. St. Augustine at once reproved them: "My brethren," said he, "either the tablet must be taken away, or you must change the conversation; or else I will go to my room."

Finally, if we, against our will, hear something bad, that we did not know before of our neighbor, how are we to act? "Charity covereth all sins," is the warning given us by the Holy Ghost. If any one speaks ill to me of a dear friend of mine, I at once think to myself that what he says is not true. And this should be the first effect of Christian charity—namely, not to be too ready to believe the uncharitable things that are said of others, according to the wise admonition: "Believe not every word." There is no doubt that plenty of talk of the kind is carried on almost everywhere, and therefore do not let anything you hear interfere with the good opinion you have of your neighbor. Besides, it is a gross injustice to condemn one who is absent and who cannot defend himself. "We must hear the other side," is a well-known axiom of jurists whenever an accusation is brought forward against a third party. But if the authority of the detractor, or the proofs he brings forward, force me to believe that my neighbor has done wrong, then, according to the laws of charity, I must put the best interpretation I can on everything, and excuse my neighbor, in thought at least, since I cannot be sure that his intention was bad.

Another thing required by the law of Christian charity of all who hear uncharitable conversations is to keep it to themselves, and not to speak of it afterwards. "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor? Let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee." Be not like those talkative people who imagine that they must explode if they do not at once tell to

others everything they hear. "At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing forth of a child. As an arrow that striketh in a man's side, so is a word in the heart of a fool." No, you must not be fools—that is, sinners. "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee." You will notice that it does not read: You must keep the word you have heard against your neighbor locked up in your breast like a malefactor in prison, but you must "let it die"—you must let it be like a dead man in the grave. And why? Because the prisoner, no matter how carefully he is guarded, may find an opportunity to escape, but a dead man, even if his grave were opened, could not come forth; his body must remain where it was placed. A prisoner may show himself to others by looking out at the window, or at least he can make his voice heard; but a dead body is unable to do either; it has neither life nor speech. Therefore, the detraction we have heard must remain buried within, not like a prisoner in his dungeon, but like a dead body in the grave. Let it die within you. Reveal it not by the least sign, nor complain about it to your friends, as so many do. "Oh," they say; "how disgusted I was to-day! I was in company with So and So, and they commenced to talk about such and such a one, and to tear him to pieces unmercifully. I wish I had remained at home!" No, I say again: "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."

I conclude this subject by again reminding you of the warning of the Holy Ghost, and begging of you for Christ's sake and for the sake of your eternal salvation, "keep yourselves, therefore, from murmuring, which profiteth nothing," and refrain your tongue from detraction. Guard against that vice of speaking ill of others, which it is so easy to fall into and so difficult to cure, and let us agree unanimously, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, to do our best to put a stop to that sin, which is the cause of such universal ruin. Amen.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

INJUSTICE AN EFFECT OF AVARICE.

"*Whatsoever thou shalt spend over and above, I at my return will repay thee.*"—Luke 10 : 35.

If the Samaritan, mentioned in to-day's Gospel, had not kept his promise and repaid the host for looking after the wounded traveler, he would indeed have done a work of mercy and charity to one, but he would have been guilty of injustice to the other. Injustice is of very frequent occurrence nowadays. I will continue to speak of avarice, or the inordinate desire of worldly goods. I have shown that this vice is the cause of many different kinds of sin, but especially of injustice; since men, blinded by the love of money, seek to gain it by unjust means. In my last sermon I briefly spoke of the fact that avarice is a very common vice, from which neither the rich nor the poor—in fact, very few men—are entirely free. To-day I intend to show that unjust avarice is also a very common vice.

I. There are many who take what belongs to others;
II. Many who keep what belongs to others;
II. Many who injure what belongs to others.

I. The first kind of injustice is committed by those who take what does not belong to them. I am not speaking now of thieves and highway robbers, who attack and rob travelers, or break into houses at night; for it is evident that such people commit grievous sin, and violate the laws of justice most flagrantly. The very name of thief is detested by every one, and imprisonment or hard labor is looked upon as meek punishment for those who thus outrage the law. But how true it is

that great thieves are let off, while petty ones are imprisoned. How many there are who, under some plausible pretext or other, actually steal more than would be required to condemn them to prison!

1. Amongst the number of such thieves are those husbands and fathers who rob their own children, by sharing with the children of a second marriage that which belongs by right only to the children of the first; or by wronging their other children out of the inheritance that justly belongs to them, for the sake of favoring unduly the child they love most. Injustice of that kind often gives rise to hatred and contention between brothers and sisters. Of the same class also are those husbands who rob their wives by squandering away their marriage portions with dissolute companions in feasting and carousing, while their poor wives and children are half starved. It is a sin that cries to heaven for a man thus to wrong those who have every right to look up to him for help and support.

2. To the same class belong those wives and mothers who rob their husbands by spending, for instance, without their husbands' knowledge and consent, a considerable sum out of the common fund; by concealing and hoarding up for themselves, that they may be richer when their husbands die, money that should go to the children or other lawful heirs; by giving considerable sums to their parents and relations. All these acts are thefts and injustices, which bind to restitution. Remember, however, that I have said, "without their husbands' knowledge and consent;" because, if the latter know what is being done and say nothing, or if they give their wives permission to act as they please in money matters relating to household expenses, then there is no theft committed. Again, I have said, if they spend a considerable sum; because it is not unlawful for them to incur the ordinary expenses suitable to their station, or to give alms reasonably and according to their means (and, if their parents are poor, they must give to them

in preference to others), even without the knowledge and consent of their husbands, for in such cases the latter would have no reasonable grounds for objecting.

3. To this class also belong children who rob their parents by stealing money from them. "He that stealeth anything from his father, or from his mother, and saith: 'This is no sin,' is the partner of a murderer" (Prov. 28 : 24). Why of a murderer? Because he treats his parents as if they were already dead, by taking possession of that which should not belong to him until after their death. Besides, who has given them a right to dispose of what must be divided equally between their brothers and sisters after their parents' death? If they were not guilty of robbing their parents, they could certainly be accused of theft toward their brothers and sisters, and of course they are bound to make restitution.

4. The same kind of theft is committed by servants who rob their masters and mistresses; this they do by often taking small things without permission, either for themselves or to give them to others, so that in time the things thus taken amount to considerable value. The same guilt is incurred by all those who receive such stolen things from servants or children, or who buy them. Sometimes servants and laborers, under the pretext of occult compensation, take away secretly from their employers more than they agreed upon as payment for their work; whether they pretend that their wages are too small, or that they have done something over and above what was agreed upon, for which, as they think, they ought to be paid, although they promised to do it freely and for nothing when making the agreement.

Gamblers, who cheat at play and win money thereby, are also guilty of theft; he who cheats is bound in conscience to restore what he has won. Thefts are committed also by those merchants and storekeepers who use short weights and measures, and if such people continue and mean to continue that

mode of action for a long time, they are in a constant state of mortal sin, which they commit every time they sell in that way; because they have constantly the intention of making an unjust profit, which will amount in the end to grievous matter. They also sin against justice who sell old, damaged goods as if they were new, and for the same price; who induce simple, inexperienced people to pay a higher price than the thing is worth; and who, when they see that a customer is in a hurry for a thing, and that he cannot have it elsewhere, charge him much higher for it.

II. I will now speak of the second kind of injustice, which is committed by those who keep what does not belong to them.

1. There are those who do not pay their servants, tradesmen, or laborers, the proper wages, or who, without just cause, retain something out of their wages, or make them wait a long time before paying them. The Sacred Scripture says: "He that sheddeth blood, and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire, are brothers. He that taketh away the bread gotten by sweat is like him that killeth his neighbor" (Ecclus. 34 : 26, 27). But how can that be? Is not the life of a human being of more account than the wages of a servant or a piece of bread? Does not he who commits a murder incur far greater guilt than he who defrauds a laborer of his hire? If so, why are they both classed together as brothers? I find the reason of that in the same chapter: "The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; he that defraudeth them thereof is a man of blood" (Ecclus. 34 : 25); for he takes away their livelihood. It is an injustice to deduct anything from, or to retain a legacy belonging to a rich man, although he can bear the loss very well; but to take away or retain even a few cents from a poor laborer, who has nothing except what he can earn by the sweat of his brow, is a far greater injustice. Therefore God gives the express command: "Thou shalt not refuse the hire of the needy, and the poor. . . .

but thou shalt pay him the price of his labor the same day, before the going down of the sun" (Deut. 24 : 14, 15). Why before the going down of the sun? Why to-day and not to-morrow? "Because he is poor, and with it maintaineth his life, lest he cry against thee to the Lord and it be reputed to thee for a sin" (Ibid.).

2. This kind of injustice is also committed by those who do not pay their debts when they can, or who borrow money or make purchases, foreseeing that they will not be able to pay, thus injuring others and retaining what belongs to them. It is to no purpose that some say they are unable to pay just now what they owe, because they continue their usual extravagant style of living, although they are bound in conscience in their present circumstances to curtail their expenses.

Read the 18th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and you will find one of those unjust debtors, in the parable of the king who demanded an account of his servants. Among others, there came to him one who owed him ten thousand talents: "And as he had not wherewith to pay it, his lord commanded that he should be sold....and all that he had, and payment to be made." You notice in this passage two expressions that seem to contradict each other, namely, "as he had not wherewith to pay," and "his lord commanded that he should be sold, and all that he had, and payment to be made." How are these to be reconciled? If the servant had nothing, how could all that he had be sold? There is no doubt that the servant had enough, but not enough to pay his debts; he could gratify his sinful desires, his vanity, his gluttony, but he could not pay his debts. In fact, it turned out afterwards that he was rich enough; for when he was on the point of being sold, he besought his master, saying: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." It is just the same with some people who refuse to pay what they owe; they have enough, but when there is question of paying their debts, they are as poor as possible;

they have not wherewith to pay. I might compare them to a hedgehog; that animal has a body, legs and feet like other animals, but if you go too near him he curls himself up and you see nothing but a prickly ball. These people say: I cannot pay my debts now. In other words, they roll themselves up like the hedgehog. They have enough for themselves; they eat well, drink well; but if any one who has waited years perhaps for his money ventures to ask them for it, they have nothing but hard words for him. I wonder what those people will do when they appear before the Judge who searches the hearts of men, and who judges justice itself?

III. The third and last class of injustice is committed by those who, although they neither take away nor keep the property of others, yet injure it deliberately.

The chief of these are judges, lawyers, officials and others of the kind, who undertake the duties of their profession, knowing that they have not the knowledge, learning or ability necessary to fulfil them; or, if they have the ability, are careless and dilatory in performing their duty, or take more upon themselves than they can properly attend to. These act unjustly, because they are the cause of all the injury that others suffer on account of their ignorance, negligence, or the number of unnecessary things they have taken on themselves, by which suits are prolonged, or concluded too hurriedly; an injury that they are bound in conscience to make good. The same is to be said of those who knowingly entrust such offices to incompetent persons. What a fearful responsibility is thus incurred, although generally men make light of it! To this class belong notaries who sign invalid, usurious, or unjust contracts; witnesses who give false testimony in a civil case; those who are sent to examine into an affair, and who spin out the examination as long as possible in order to make more money by it; pettifoggers who, although they know a case to be unjust, undertake to de-

fend it, and urge an appeal against a judgment unfavorable to them, although they know that the appeal will be fruitless and that it will uselessly increase the expenses of their opponents.

With these mischievous thieves must be classed guardians who are careless of the property of their wards; housekeepers, servants and others who do not look after what is entrusted to their care, or allow others to take it when they can prevent them from doing so; all who harbor thieves; all who, by command, counsel, approval, or hindrance, are the cause of injury to others; all who take or give away a part of a thing, without which part the thing is useless to its owner. The day would be too short for me to speak of all the different ways in which injustice is practised; and if all the injustice that is daily committed in the world were to meet its due, where would prisons enough be found? But what escapes the eyes and ears of earthly justice will one day be exposed to the whole world, examined, and condemned by the justice of God, and unless true penance has been done, and restitution made, it will be severely punished. Consider the sentence that will be pronounced against the wicked on the day of judgment because they did not feed the hungry, nor give drink to the thirsty, nor clothe the naked, nor visit the sick and those in prison. If he who did not give of his own is to be cast into the fire, what will become of him who stole the property of others? If he is to be sent to hell to whom Christ can say: I was naked and you have not clothed me, what sort of a hell will be in store for him to whom he can say: I was clothed, and you have taken the clothes from off my body? If he who refused to shelter Christ in the person of his poor must take his place among the demons, what will become of him who by treachery and cunning has driven the poor from their homes? In a word, if he who has not done good to his neighbor will be lost forever, how can he who has in any way robbed and injured his neighbor hope to get to heaven? Amen.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NECESSITY OF RESTORING ILL-GOTTEN GOODS.

"*There is no one found to return and give glory to God.*" —Luke 17 : 18.

To return and give thanks for having been restored to health is certainly an obligation which the law of gratitude imposes on all men; but amongst ten there was found only one who fulfilled this law, as our Lord complains in to-day's Gospel: "Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?" Without further delay I will speak of the law of justice. On last Sunday I explained that many men practise different kinds of injustice, and what I fear is that out of every ten who do so hardly one is to be found to come back and make restitution for what he has taken, kept, or injured of the property of others; and yet

I. The restitution of ill-gotten goods is necessary.

II. It is absolutely necessary, and nothing can excuse one from making it.

I. I must restore what I have unjustly taken, what I unjustly possess, or what I have injured of the property belonging to others. All laws, human, natural, and divine, say: "Pay what thou owest." This law is written in the hearts of men; no one can doubt of this obligation; and it is a duty founded on the first principles of nature and human intercourse: "Do not to another what you do not wish to be done to yourself."

1. What fearful disorders would arise if one were allowed to retain what he acquires dishonestly. Stealing, usury, oppres-

sion, how common they are even now, when people know that they are bound to give back the stolen property! How would it be if there was no such obligation—if, after repenting of one's sin, there was no further atonement required, so that the thief might consider himself the lawful owner of what he has stolen?

2. There is no sin so great that the Catholic Church has not power to forgive, provided the sinner is truly sorry and firmly purposes amendment. You may have committed all kinds of impurity, you may have cursed your neighbor, you may have beaten your father and mother, blasphemed God; yet, fearful as those sins are, if you are sincerely sorry for them and confess them, with a sincere purpose of amendment, you have done all that is required on your part to be freed from those terrible sins, and to become again a child of God. But if you have stolen a single dollar, and are in a position to restore it, but fail to do so, even if you were to weep tears of blood for your sin and most solemnly promise never to do the like again, and confess the theft a hundred times, it is all of no use. If you do not make restitution when you can, not all the power on earth and in heaven, neither priest nor bishop, can absolve you, and if you receive absolution a hundred times it will do you no good; the sentence of absolution cannot be ratified even by God; the owner of the stolen property is the only one who, if he wishes, can free you from the obligation of restitution. That man comes to hear Christ speaking to him in sermons on Sundays and holydays, that he may learn how to do good; a pious man he must be, from all appearances; but has he restored the unjust gain he made in his business by cheating and trickery of all kinds? If he has not, I am afraid that, although he has admitted the Saviour into his heart, salvation is not come to him. That man lives in a pious and Christian manner outwardly; that woman is looked upon as a saint; she goes two or three times a week to confession and holy Communion; very good signs, indeed. But, I ask, do these people pay their

debts? Do they restore what they possess unjustly? No matter how often they receive their Saviour in the holy Communion, if they refuse to do that there is no salvation for them. Sincere sorrow, confession and a firm purpose of amendment, although they are sufficient for the remission of any other kind of sin, are not of the least use in a case of injustice, without the firm purpose of making rēstitution, when it is possible. "Such a sorrow is a delusion; the sin will not be forgiven until restitution is made." And nothing can excuse from this but inability alone; that is to say, if you have not the means of making restitution; but even in that case, you must still have the sincere wish and intention of making restitution as soon as ever you can.

3. It is a remarkable thing that in this matter God is more careful, so to speak, of the rights and the property of men than he is of his own rights. He has appointed his priests as judges, with full power to forgive all sins that are committed against his honor alone; but he gives them no power to free any one from the obligation of restoring the ill-gotten property. So strictly has God commanded restitution to be made. To give back what of right belongs to another is necessary, absolutely and indispensably, and nothing can excuse from it.

II. Were you to ask every one here, all would say at once that of course restitution is necessary; no one ever doubted that. But if you were to ask one who possesses dishonestly something of value and were to say to him: Come, now, give back what you know does not belong to you, I am afraid there would be a good deal of hesitation, and all sorts of excuses would be brought forward to show that either the obligation does not exist in this particular case, or that it is not urgent. Let us examine the principal excuses that are given.

1. I myself am very often cheated and robbed; many things are stolen from me; people do not pay me what they owe me;

I have never known any one to make restitution to me, although I have often missed articles of value; when restitution is made to me, I will make it to others. Such is the first excuse, but, in my opinion, it is the most flimsy of all; it might hold good with a fool, but not with a sensible man. Because you have been wronged, you are allowed to wrong others; because you have been robbed, you are allowed to steal from your neighbor; no one pays you what is due you, therefore you need not give back what you have belonging to others, nor pay what you owe them. Tell me, did they who robbed you act rightly? No, you will say; they were thieves and rogues. Nor are you yourself a bit better, for you have stolen from others. They who do not restore what they have unjustly taken from you, are they in the right? No; they will go to hell with their ill-gotten gains. And if so, how can you think that you, with your ill-gotten gains, can go to heaven unless you make restitution? Your excuse is worthless; pay what you owe, give back what you possess wrongfully.

2. A second says: I acknowledge that I must make restitution, but I cannot. And what prevents you? My honor and good name are worth more than gold to me. If I made restitution I should lose them, and should be looked upon as a thief. That is indeed a plausible excuse; your good name! Which do you think the more valuable—your honor in time, or the salvation of your soul in eternity? Keep your honor by all means, but do not lose your soul for its sake. Why have you acted in such a way as to risk being looked upon as a thief if it becomes known? Who forced you to be dishonest? Must the innocent suffer on that account, and lose their right to what belongs to them? Besides, in what does a good name consist? In being guilty of theft and injustice, or in fulfilling the law of justice? To give back what one possesses unjustly is a good, praiseworthy and necessary act of justice, which will not make you a thief or a rogue; but to keep what you have stolen is the

very thing that will make every honest man look upon you as a thief. Still, as you are so anxious about your good name, ask an experienced and prudent confessor to help you; tell him clearly what, how much, and in what way you have taken unjustly; he will be able to tell you how to make restitution and at the same time to preserve your honor intact, so that not a soul will know anything of it to your discredit, not even the person whom you have wronged. Therefore, pay what you owe.

3. But, a third will say, what is to become of my children, if I must make full restitution? How can I ruin them? How can I see them not so well clad as formerly, and having less to eat? It would be like tearing my heart out. You are completely mistaken; if you refuse to make restitution, you will then ruin your children in reality, for you will place them in the unhappy state of sin. When you are in hell, your children will either make restitution, or they will not. If they fulfil their duty, what richer are they for what you have left them? None at all, but they have all the trouble that you should have taken in restoring your ill-gotten gains to their lawful owner. If they do not fulfil their duty, although they know, or have a reasonable suspicion, that what they possess has been unjustly acquired, then you drag them, and perhaps their children's children, down to hell also; because no prescription, not even of a hundred thousand years, can justify any one in keeping property which is known to be the result of dishonesty; the obligation of restitution still remains.

We read in the Book of Job: "The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up" (Job 20 : 15). If a man eats too greedily food which the stomach cannot digest, he is compelled to reject it again, and with it, the other food which would otherwise have been easily digested. Ill-gotten goods are an indigestible morsel; not only are they hurtful in themselves, but also they generally bring about the loss of what has been honestly acquired. "The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall

vomit up, and God shall draw them out of his belly." Experience teaches us that there are many families, the members of which toil and worry day after day, but cannot get things to prosper with them; they are always in difficulties and cannot find the reason of it. Ah, if their dead ancestors could come up out of their graves they could show their descendants the cause of their poverty; show them that money and property which they gained by usury, bribery, injustice, and left to them. That is the hidden worm that is gnawing away their property, that is the indigestible morsel that compels them to part with the fruits of their honest labor. What will become of my children? Give back what you have no right to, and you will merit for your children a blessing from that God who gave back to his servant Job sevenfold all that he had lost. Pay what you owe.

From all this you can see how foolish and senseless it is to desire and seek for unlawful gain; for I ask you again: Do you intend to make restitution or not? If you do intend it, why do you take what you must give back, greatly against your will? Why should you, then, burden your conscience and offend God by such a foolish and unprofitable sin? Do you intend to keep what you have got dishonestly? Oh, then I pity your poor soul, for you are doing a still more foolish thing. Do you wish to be lost for ever? "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16 : 26.) If one of you were condemned to the gallows and the chance of saving his life and reputation were offered him on condition of his paying two or three thousand dollars, would he not willingly part with that sum, if he had it, to save himself from a shameful death? If there is any one here, as I hope there is not, who possesses anything unjustly, I tell you in the name of God that you are sentenced to eternal death, that you will burn in hell forever, if you keep what is not yours. The only means of avoiding this shameful death is restitution,

and will you hesitate to make it? In order to preserve your temporal life, that will last, may be, only a few days, you are ready to give away all you have; but to preserve your eternal life and to save yourself from hell, you hesitate about parting with a little money that does not belong to you; money that death will soon take from you violently, hurling your soul down amongst the devils in hell.

For the sake of your salvation, pay what you owe. Give back to that storekeeper what you cheated him of; make restitution to those customers with whom you have dealt dishonestly; if you do not do it now, death will come and will cry out to you in a terrible voice: leave the money that you made unjustly, the property that you never had a right to; give back the blood of the poor that you have gorged yourself with; away, accursed one! out of the house of which you were never a rightful owner; away with you to that hell which you yourself have chosen for the sake of your unjust gains! Amen.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE PRESUMPTION OF EVERY SINNER.

"*He will sustain the one, and despise the other.*"—Matth. 6 : 24.

"No man can serve two masters;" no one can serve God, and at the same time the devil, the flesh, or the world. Now, what does man do when he commits a mortal sin? He hates his God, who is his lawful Master, and loves the world, or the flesh; he sustains the devil, and despises his God. Oh, sinners, is there one among you who finds it hard to acknowledge his sins and repent of them? Let him only consider well what

it means to have treated his Lord and his God with contempt, and he will find therein cause enough for the most profound sorrow and detestation of his offences. This sermon will be profitable not only for sinners, to arouse them to repentance and amendment, but also for those who have already repented of and amended their wicked lives, to keep them from relapsing into sin, and also for the just and the innocent, to give them a greater knowledge of the malice of sin, and thus inspire them with a greater horror of it.

Every one who commits a mortal sin treats his Lord and his God most contemptuously.

How great is the Lord our God? If I could say how great God is, then either I should be another God, or God should not be what he is. For he alone can understand and say how great he is, and he can say it to no one but himself; because no understanding outside of him can comprehend the height and greatness of his majesty. Ask the heavenly hosts of Angels who surround his throne and see him clearly how great this Lord is. They will turn away from you in silence, and, trembling with awe, veil their faces before him, as if they could not bear the brightness of his majesty. The philosopher Simonides, on being asked about the essence and perfection of God, requested three days' time to consider the question, and at the expiration of that time deferred answering for another three days, so that his answer might be complete and satisfactory. Three days, indeed, and three days again! If all the Cherubim and Seraphim were to spend a whole eternity thinking of it, they could neither understand nor explain what a great Lord God is. This is all we can think and say, with the Psalmist: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of his greatness there is no end."

If we consider his power, who can resist him? He is the Lord; to will and to accomplish is the same thing to him. Does

he wish to create the world and all that is in it, or millions of worlds vaster and more beautiful than this? He requires no help, no instrument for that purpose, but a single word, the breath of his mouth, as the royal prophet says: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth." And where does he place the world? On what foundation? "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." Let the most clever inventors, the most experienced masters and talented artists of the whole world put their heads together and see whether they can find any way of making even an apple remain unsupported in the air without falling to the ground.

And yet that great and powerful Lord you and I, and all who commit mortal sin, insult by despising his authority, his majesty, and his almighty and supreme power. Is it not "the Lord himself against whom we have sinned?" (Is. 42 : 28.) For what else is sin but a transgression of the divine commands, an opposition of a created will to the will of the Creator, a rebellion and disobedience by which man refuses to do what God commands him to do, or does what God forbids him to do? Hear how this great Lord complains of all sinners: "I called, and you did not answer; I spoke, and you did not hear; and you did evil in my eyes, and you have chosen the things that displease me" (Is. 65 : 12). This very day the Lord says to you and to me that we must keep within the bounds of the law he has laid down for us, and never refuse him our service. But what answer do we give him when we commit sin? "I will not serve" (Jer. 2 : 20).

Yes, so shamefully do we treat God whenever we transgress his commands! He says to us that we must sanctify the Lord's day, and devote all Sundays and holydays to his service alone by good works; but we answer: no, we will not serve; we will spend those days in gambling and drinking. He says we must honor father and mother, and treat them with due respect, obey

and love them; but, with all disobedient children, we answer: no, we will not serve. He commands parents to "bring up their children in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Ephes. 6 : 4); to train them up in his fear and love for their last end, not to teach them worldly vanities, but to keep them from evil and lead them on to good. No, says the father or mother, I will not serve; you may command me a thousand times, but I will not obey. "I say to you, love your enemies" (Matt. 5 : 44); forgive them from your hearts; do not cherish hatred, anger, or a desire of revenge. But the vindictive man refuses to obey; let me only get my enemy in my power, he says, and I will revenge myself in spite of God's command; I will not obey; I cannot and will not endure the sight of that man. He commands us not to steal, nor to injure another man's property, either by word or deed, or to hinder another's prosperity, or to retain anything unjustly. No, is the answer; I will not serve; I will steal whenever I can; I will get possession of that property unjustly; I will not make restitution. He commands us not to commit adultery, nor to give way to impurity even in thought or desire, much less in words or acts; to avoid dangerous company, and to renounce at once that unlawful attachment. But the answer is again, I will not serve; I prefer thy creature to thy command; I will give every freedom to my eyes, ears, and other senses; I must gratify my lusts. He commands us not to curse our neighbor, nor to wish him harm, nor to speak ill of him, nor in any way to scandalize him, or give him occasion to sin. But his command is disregarded; I will not serve, is the answer; I will not obey. He says: But I am the Lord thy God who command thee! No matter, I will not obey. But I will punish you in hell with the demons if you are disobedient! No matter, I disregard thy threats; I will not serve.

When king Pharao was told, on the part of God, that he should allow the Israelites to go, he answered at once: "Who is

the Lord that I should hear his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." Pharao paid no attention to what God said. But he would have shown far greater pride and insolence if he had said: I know the Lord, but I will not hear his voice, nor receive any commands from him. What the shameless pride of Pharao could not do, that you do, oh, sinner! For you acknowledge God to be your supreme Lord and Master; you know full well what he so earnestly requires of you, and yet you dare say to him that you will not hear his voice, nor listen to his command, nor obey him, nor serve him. Is not that despising his authority and supreme power? Is not that an act of rebellion against his will? If the Lord were your equal, could you act more insolently toward him? But, you think, far be that from me; I have never said such a thing in my whole life; I have sinned, not through contempt of God, but for the sake of gain or pleasure. True, you have not said it in words; but you have by your sinful actions, which speak louder than any tongue could. If I give you a blow on the cheek, although I keep silent, and do not say I wish to hurt you, you feel it all the same, and I have insulted you; for I know well that you do not like it. You command your servant-maid to do something; she says nothing, but does not obey; you may command or threaten as you will, she continues obstinate. Do you not think her guilty of contemning your authority? You certainly do not propose to yourself contempt of God as the end and aim of your actions; but in reality you do contemn him, since you know that act to be in direct opposition to his express command. Can there be a greater presumption?

Miserable man, what makes you so daring and insolent as to provoke one who can in a moment hurl you into the depths of hell? Suppose I held you by the hair of the head suspended over the parapet of a bridge, ready to drop you into the water; how would you behave toward me? Would you struggle against me, abuse and curse, and try to beat me? Oh, no; you

would keep quite still, for I need only open my hand to let you drop into the river below, where you would be drowned. I think you would rather be inclined to talk very gently to me, and to beg my pardon most humbly, if you had ever done anything to offend me. And yet, if I let you fall, I should only take away your temporal life; I could not do your soul the least harm. Now I ask you, has not your Lord and your God got you in his hands far more than I should in that imaginary case? When, how, and where he wills, he has complete power over you. If he withdraws his all-powerful hand from you, where will you fall? Not into a river, from which you might possibly be rescued, but into the abyss of hell, thus losing not only the temporal life of the body, but the eternal life of the soul. He is the Lord whom Christ tells us to fear: "Fear him that can destroy both soul and body into hell" (Matt. 10 : 28). Nor would it cost him any trouble to do this in a moment; for all the creatures he has made are so many executioners who stand ready to do his bidding, and to inflict punishment on you. They all cry out against the sinner, just as Abisai did against Semei, who was reviling his king, David: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? I will go and cut off his head" (2 Kings 16 : 9). The lightning and hail are ready to strike him. The demons are only waiting the word to carry him off. If the Lord only gave a sign there would be an end to the sinner. And yet, oh, man, you, who are so completely in the hands of God, in all places and at all times, dare to defy and provoke him, to despise his commands, and to say by your actions, I will not serve thee, oh, Lord; I will not do as thou commandest!

Many may think that God is too strict with his poor creatures, that the pains of hell are too severe for a single sin, and that it is not right to have to spend a whole eternity in fearful torments for a momentary pleasure, that may have been consented to only in thought. True, it is a severe punishment to

have to spend a hundred years, a hundred thousand years, in hell, and yet to have hardly reached the beginning, not to speak of the end of eternity, and that, too, for one sin that was committed in a moment. But if we consider the malice and presumption with which it was committed, we shall find that it is not the momentary pleasure which is so severely punished, but the perverse will with which the sinner has enjoyed that pleasure, knowing that he was acting against God's express command. And if we remember what a great Lord he is who is thus despised, and whose majesty is thus insulted, knowingly and deliberately, and for such a miserable thing, by one who is always in the power of that Lord, then we shall understand why the punishment of hell, instead of being too severe for one sin, is not severe enough, and that God shows his mercy even when chastising sinners eternally.

What, oh, sinners, are the thoughts and resolutions that this truth inspires you with? Will you still continue in the state in which you now are? Ah, I beg of you, change at once! You have against you a great Lord, whose enmity you have first provoked by wanton insults, and from whose power you can never escape. Do you intend to sin again? Ah, think of what you do! The duration of the sin is short, the pleasure or profit it brings you is small, but the injury you thereby offer to God is exceeding great. If you are ever assailed by a violent passion or temptation, if company or occasion is about to lead you into sin, if the desire of unjust gain, or of revenge, or the unlawful love of a creature almost compels you to transgress the divine law, then, I beg of you, wait a moment; say to yourselves first: where am I going to? what am I doing? God is present and sees me. What a fearful temptation it was that Joseph had to endure in Egypt from the continual solicitations of that wanton woman, Putiphar's wife. And yet the mere thought of the injury he would do his master by consenting was enough to keep him from sin. "How can I do this wicked

thing," he said, "and sin against my God?" (Gen. 39 : 9.) Such, too, should be our dispositions in all temptations and occasions of sin. Shall I sin against God? we should say: no, I cannot do this evil thing.

How often and how shamelessly have we not offended God hitherto! Alas, we have been able to do many wicked things, for we have done them, and have sinned against him in thought, word, and deed, and have despised him by trampling under foot his holy law. But that same God whom we have offended, and who is as good as he is great, desires not the death, but the repentance of his disobedient servants. Let us, then, say, full of contrition and sorrow: I have sinned against thee, but I am sorry for it from the bottom of my heart. Have mercy on me, according to thy great mercy. I will at once do thy will by candidly confessing my sins, and will never again, during my whole life, consent to sin, but be zealous in thy service, as I have been hitherto shameless in insulting and despising thee. Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF RESTITUTION.

"*He gave him to his mother.*"—Luke 7 : 15.

Why did Christ give back the young man to his mother, after having restored him to life? Did he still belong to his mother? No; once death has intervened, although one is restored to life by a miracle, all the bonds are loosed which during life connect men with each other, whether they arise from natural ties, or from mutual agreement. Thus, if to-day a husband dies, and to-morrow is restored to life again, his former marriage is an-

nulled, and both husband and wife are freed from all obligations toward each other. Still, if a child restored to life should belong to any one, there is no doubt that it is to his mother. Therefore: "He gave him to his mother." After this digression I return to the matter I have already spoken of. I have said and proved that it is indispensably necessary to make restitution in order to avoid eternal damnation, so that inability alone can excuse one from making it. But there is still one point, and that is the manner and circumstances of restitution.

I. Who must make restitution?
II. To whom must it be made?
III. What must be restored?
IV. When must it be restored?

I. Who must make restitution? That obligation rests on those who take, keep, or in any way injure what belongs to others. Would to God that all who know of this obligation would fulfil it when it concerns them, according to their knowledge! How many injustices are being committed daily! How seldom do we hear of restitution being duly made for them! Men are most eager to take the property of others, but very sluggish about restoring it. Restitution is generally made by such people as poor servants, or workmen who have taken a few shillings from their employers; when they hear injustice spoken of their conscience at once begins to annoy them, and they try in their poverty to find the means of giving back secretly what they have stolen, or of making good any injury they have done others; and if they have no other means, they try to make up for the theft by increased diligence in their work. But what of the great thieves who commit gross injustices, who steal by hundreds and thousands in their offices or business dealings? Do they come back and make restitution? No; it is not easy to find people of that kind who are willing to make restitution, although they are bound to do so.

Besides, we must not forget that not only the people themselves who have taken, kept, or injured the property of others, but also their children, heirs and all who share in the unjust gain, are under the same obligation, if the former do not make restitution, and the latter are aware of the injustice committed. Yet, many a one thinks to himself, what is it to me if my ancestors, or others from whom I have received anything, have acquired unjustly what they have given me? Let them look to it; it is their own affair; I have not stolen; I have taken in good faith what they have given me; how could I prevent them from doing wrong? No, that will not do; what is unjustly gained always cries out for its lawful owner: "Pay what thou owest." Even if I buy a thing with my own money, and hear that it is stolen, I must give it back and suffer the loss. The sin of injustice is the only one that binds the children and descendants of the guilty man to atonement. "As I live, saith the Lord God, this parable shall be no more to you a proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, the same shall die" (Ezech. 18 : 3, 4), and no others on account of it. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the justice of the just shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezech. 18 : 26). Therefore, if the father is wicked, he alone has to bear the penalty. If the son is pious, all the better for himself. But in the matter of restitution the proverb is quite true: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge;" the children share in the sin of their parents if they do not restore the unjustly acquired property left them by their parents.

From this parents can see how foolishly they act when they try to enrich their children by dishonest means. They think that it is out of parental love and tenderness they are acting when they endeavor to leave them a rich legacy, while in re-

ality they could not do a worse thing for them than to leave them what they have made dishonestly. If they were determined, against the law of nature, to make their children miserable in time and eternity, they could not better carry out their cruel purpose than by making them heirs of their unjust gains; for in that way they lay them under an obligation so grievous and so troublesome that it is very likely that they will never fulfil it properly.

II. To whom must restitution be made? To him who is the owner of the stolen or injured property. Many men make a grievous mistake in this matter; they think they will satisfy their consciences and fulfil their obligation by giving the stolen money to the poor, or to the church, or by having Masses said for it. If you do not know, and, after diligent inquiry, cannot find out the person you have stolen from or injured, then it is enough for you to give the stolen money to the poor, or to get Masses said for it; but you must devote to this purpose not merely a part, but the whole of the money in question, and that you are bound to do in those circumstances under pain of sin. But if you can find out the lawful owner, neither alms nor Masses will suffice, nor an offering to the church; the rightful owner must have what belongs to him. It is a work of Christian charity to give alms, but they must be given from one's own, and not from what belongs to other people. The poor man to whom you give an alms rejoices and prays for you, but the man whom you have wronged cries out to heaven for vengeance on you; which of these two will God hear? When you give alms it is to Jesus Christ himself you give them; but you rob Jesus Christ in the person of your neighbor to whom you have acted dishonestly. Tell me, would you be satisfied if a man were to take your money from you and give it to the poor? No, you would say; if I want to give alms I can do so myself.

1. It is cruel not to help the hungry and naked when one

can, but it is still greater cruelty to throw them stinking carrion, in the shape of other people's money. If the poor are good Christians they must protest against it and cry out with St. Ambrose: "Do not feed us with the blood of our brethren." The pelican feeds its young with blood; it tears open its own breast in order to give its blood to its young; but the eagle gives to its young the flesh and blood of other birds and beasts. If you feed the poor, you must do it like the pelican, and not like the eagle. The elder Tobias said to his son: "Give alms out of thy substance" (Tob. 4 : 7): do not give them out of what belongs to others. Christ has said: give alms, and not avarice; what is given out of the property of others is no alms, although it be given to the needy. If you have stolen only one dollar, and give a thousand dollars in alms, still you have not restored the dollar.

2. You say: I will have Masses said for it. Fine Masses they will be! A nice sacrifice that, which you offer to God with other people's money! You wish to have Masses said, and to bedew the altar of the Lord with the tears of the poor whom you have deceived and wronged; must not the Most High reject such a sacrifice with disgust? Certainly, for, according to the Wise Man: "The victims of the wicked are abominable to the Lord" (Prov. 15 : 8), because they come from injustice. Stolen incense is not accepted in heaven; the sighs of the poor find a hearing before the prayers of the priest. God looks upon such a sacrifice as an abomination, not certainly in itself, for the holy Mass is a most pleasing sacrifice in the eyes of God, but because it is offered with money unjustly gained and with the blood of the poor. "If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee;" I say, if you remember that you owe your brother anything: "leave there thy gift before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother." I say: go and give your neighbor what belongs to him, "and then come and

offer thy gift." Then, if you wish, you may have Masses said.

I will give the money to the church, thinks a third; I will keep a lamp burning constantly, or will have an altar put up. And what good will it do you to give to the church the money that belongs to other people? That is a present like the one Judas offered when he threw down in the temple the thirty pieces of silver, the blood-money for which he sold our Lord; a present that deserves the answer that St. Peter gave to Simon the magician, when the latter wished to purchase from him the power of giving the Holy Ghost: "Keep thy money to thyself to perish with thee" (Acts 8 : 20). Away with your gift! Restore what does not belong to you. But to whom? To its rightful owner, and to no one else. Give back the money you made by charging unjust interest in times of scarcity; give back to your workmen the wages you still owe them; make restitution to those whom you have defrauded of their rights. Give it all back, but to no one except its lawful owner; and if he is no longer alive, give it to his heirs or to his children. But if none of these can be found, then you can and must give it to the poor, not as a charitable alms, but as a debt that you are obliged to pay under pain of sin.

III. What must be restored? We must restore whatever we have taken, kept, or injured. There can be no doubt of that; but we must not forget that all has to be restored, when possible; it will not do to give back the half or any other part only. How rarely are instances found of such exact restitution. Besides, not only must restitution be made for what one has unjustly taken, kept, or injured, but also all the harm suffered by the lawful owner on account of being deprived of his property must be made good. For instance: I have stolen a hundred dollars, and kept them for ten years; at last my conscience begins to trouble me, and I make restitution through my confessor. Thanks be to goodness, then, that I am relieved of that

load. But wait, the load is not quite got rid of yet! But how is that? I have given back the hundred dollars I stole! Quite so; but you must remember that the owner of that money could have made profit with it during those ten years had he had it. So that that profit has to be restored to him, although the money has been lying idle all the time in the possession of the thief; for the latter is the cause of the loss that the owner suffered by not being able to make his legitimate profit. Nay, if the owner were unable to carry on his business for the want of the hundred dollars I have stolen, so that he has become poor, I am bound to reinstate him. So that I shall have made a fine profit by my theft! And it is a not infrequent consequence of unjust gain that the stolen thing has to be restored two, three or four times over before one's sin can be forgiven. We have an example of this again in Zaccheus, who promised to restore fourfold any wrong he had inflicted on others; that is, he was ready not only to give back what he had taken unjustly, but also to make good all the loss caused by his act.

IV. Finally, when is restitution to be made? The answer is: As soon as possible, so that no unnecessary delay is allowed. He who commits a theft has the guilt of it on his soul as long as he defers making restitution, when it is in his power to make it; nay, the sin is renewed as often as he remembers that he has what belongs to another, and renews his determination not to restore it yet. This teaching is based on the natural law of justice, which forbids us to wrong any one. For he whom I have stolen from has always the right to his property, a right that I violate as long as I am determined to keep his property against his will; and, as I do him wrong by stealing from him, so also I wrong him by unjustly hindering him from using what is his own; but that I do every day and hour that I put off restitution, when it is in my power to make it. This holds good also for all those who borrow money and, without just cause,

defer repaying it beyond the time appointed. When they wish to borrow money they bow and scrape in the most humble manner, and are full of honied words and promises: "Till they receive, they kiss the hands of the lender, and in promises they humble their voice; but when they should repay, they will ask time" (Ecclus. 29 : 5, 6). And if the creditor presses for his money, "they will return tedious and murmuring words and will complain of the time. And if he be able to pay, he will stand off" (Ibid. 6 : 7). Finally, after long waiting, the unfortunate creditor, instead of getting his money, is put off with abuse and hard words. "He will defraud him of his money, and he shall get him for an enemy without cause; and he will pay him with reproaches and curses, and instead of honor and good turn will repay him injuries" (Ibid. 8 : 9). If this is right and just, what will be reckoned as an injustice?

I will make restitution, many a one thinks, but not yet. And when will you do it? Some other time. Why not now, since it is in your power? It is evident that you are not willing to be converted and to return to God, and to leave off sinning. I will make restitution when I am dying; I will put it in my will. When you are dying? That is a fine penance, indeed, that you put off to your deathbed! You will restore on your deathbed what you can no longer possess, and which leaves you, instead of you leaving it. A restitution of that kind is like throwing goods overboard out of a ship in a storm, in order to prevent her from sinking. From what motive will you act? Hardly from love of God and of justice, but because you cannot help yourself and because you are afraid of death. I will leave it in my will. But suppose you die without making a will, what is to become of your soul? If your will is already made, but your children and heirs defer restitution, like yourself, what will become of your soul? Why do you put it off? Pay what thou owest, and at once.

In order to avoid all this trouble, let us never seek to make

any unjust gain. Better is it to have only a little, better to have nothing at all, with God as our friend, and a quiet conscience, than to have much money—nay, all the treasures of the world—with God as our enemy, and an uneasy conscience. Better be poor and honest than rich and dishonest. "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6 : 33). Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

TO FIND FAULT WITH, AND TO INTERPRET IN A BAD SENSE, THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS, IS A GREAT INJUSTICE.

"*They watched him.*"—Luke 14 : 1.

The Pharisees, being filled with hatred and envy of our Lord, kept a close watch on everything he did. They desired to see or to hear something from him which they could have found fault with, so as to make him odious to the people. For this reason alone "they watched him." How many critical observers of the same kind can be counted in our days, who examine, watch, and pry into the actions of others, put a wrong interpretation on and criticise them, make them the subject of rash judgments and groundless suspicions, and thus talk of and condemn their faults and failings! A vice which, alas! is very common among all classes of people, and is especially

Opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence.

1. Everything that comes from passion is opposed to fraternal charity; for we can easily imagine that, when we have a bitter

feeling toward another, we are not likely to think or speak well of him when he is made the subject of conversation. Anything that we hear, see, or suspect him of to his discredit we cannot keep secret; we must speak of it at the first opportunity, and we are more inclined to exaggerate than to lessen it. We say: "do you know what happened lately? Such and such a one acted most shamefully; his villainy has been discovered; I cannot trust him any longer; I thought that man knew better; he pretended to be very clever, but now he has made a grievous blunder." But they who thus give way to hatred of their neighbor are not always willing to make known their feelings; much less do they wish to incur the blame of trying to injure another's character, and therefore they endeavor to conceal their motive as well as they can. It is a well-known fact, they say, otherwise I would not mention it; I am sorry for the poor man; it is a great pity he has such a fault. Oh, hypocrite! Are you really sorry for him? If so, why do you not try to conceal his faults, that he may at least have a chance of retaining the esteem of others? Why do you bring further disgrace on him by relating his faults? It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! If it is so well-known, then what is the use of your saying anything about it? You are merely wasting your words. Suppose I said to you: "Two and two make four; to-day is Sunday; these are well-known facts, otherwise I would not mention them;" would you not think me mad? We know these facts already, you would say; there is no necessity for you to repeat them to us; tell us something that we do not know. It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! To whom is it known? To yourself, and not to others? Then you are evidently guilty of injuring your neighbor's character; you act against the right he has to his good name, and you are alone to blame for making known his faults. If his faults are known to many in the town, but not to those to whom you speak of them, you still cannot be excused from a breach of

charity, since you spread still further what is disadvantageous to his good name. If Christian charity and not ill-feeling prompted you to speak, you would find in the same person many good qualities that redound to his praise; but as it is, you say not a word about them. You are like a spider; you seek the poison, and leave the honey behind, because your heart is full of ill-will against your neighbor.

2. There is still a worse consequence of that fault-finding and criticising when it comes from hatred and envy; for not only are the faults and failings of another noticed and talked of, but even his good qualities are misinterpreted; because, when the heart is once filled with hatred of another, it is very hard to look with a favorable eye at anything he does. The envious Pharisees were not satisfied with criticising what they imagined to be faulty in Christ and his disciples; they found fault even with what they should have praised and approved of. Such is the complaint our Lord makes in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say: he hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11 : 18, 19). If I drive out devils, they say I do it in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of devils; if I heal the sick and teach the people, they cry me down as a disturber and a raiser of sedition. Such Pharisees are still to be found in great numbers amongst Christians. If one whom they do not love is really humble of heart, they call him a hypocrite; if he is patient and a lover of peace, he is looked on as a coward; if he frequents respectable company, he is accused of being fond of the pleasures of the table; if he avoids company, he is called a misanthropist; if he does his duty without any regard to human respect, he is looked on as an unmannerly boor; if he is friendly and polite to every one, he is considered a flatterer and a deceiver. This hatred and ill-will finds something sinful and faulty even in virtues, and when

a man forms a judgment of that kind, of course it comes out in conversation with others.

Nay, what adds to the malice and injustice of these hostile criticisms is that when nothing in a person's outward life and actions can be found fault with, his secret thoughts and intentions, although known only to God and himself, are made the object of attack, and bad motives are imputed to him; his words and actions and behavior are carefully studied, in order to find in them some proof that his intentions are bad. Thus they say: that priest goes so often to that house and visits such and such a person, he cannot mean anything good by it, that woman, that girl is always well dressed when she appears in church, she can hardly come for devotion's sake alone; she never paid for that dress out of her own pocket; I have seen those two talking together for a long time, and could see by their manner how they are affected toward each other; did you not notice what a face so and so made? I can easily guess what he is thinking of; did you hear what he said, on that occasion? I know what he means well enough. Do not people very often talk in the manner spoken of by St. James in his Epistle, although in a different sense: "Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts?" (James 2 : 4.)

3. How do you know that what you say of that person is true? I have seen, or heard it, you answer. And that is generally the only foundation of the criticism: I have seen, or heard it! That is the judgment-seat before which the virtues are summoned to receive their sentence. Has not God given us to understand clearly enough that we must not trust such treacherous witnesses as our eyes and ears? "He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears" (Is. 11 : 3). How many there are whom these senses deceive! "I have seen it!" What have you seen? "What that man did, where he went, how he behaved." And is that all? Have you seen his heart? Have

you seen the intention he had in acting as he did, in going to that place, in behaving in that way? For it is certain that the goodness or malice of an outward act depend principally on the intention one has when performing it. "For what man," asks St. Paul, "knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?" (1 Cor. 2 : 11.) If you were to see a young woman, splendidly dressed, going through a hostile camp to the tent of a general whose licentiousness is well known, and spending the night in it, what would you think? Oh, certainly, you would say, she has lost her virtue, and is a bad woman. And yet that was done in the Old Law by one of the most chaste of women, Judith, whose purity was untarnished.

"I have heard it." Indeed? And must it be true therefore? If we are to take all we hear as Gospel, there will be no lies in the world any longer. If everything people say is true, hardly any one will have a good character, and we must look on Susanna and Joseph as guilty of adultery, and our Lord himself as a drinker of wine, a disturber of the people, a blasphemer, and a deceiver. Susanna was accused on oath by the two elders, and all the people believed the accusation, and were about to stone her; Joseph was accused by the wife of Putiphar, and was cast into prison; Christ himself was publicly accused by the high-priest, the scribes, and nearly all the Jewish people, and was condemned to death and nailed to the Cross; yet all these accusations were wicked calumnies. How often have you not been deceived by reports you have heard, so that you have afterwards found to be false what you at first believed? How often do not people interpret a thing in a wrong sense, either because they do not understand what is said, or because some important word has escaped their ears? How often does it not happen that an exaggerated or an imperfect report of a thing makes it look quite different from what it really is?

3. Supposing even that what you say is literally true, and

that many are already aware of it—nay, more, supposing that no harm is done to any one by your talking of it—yet you can hardly avoid violating Christian charity even then. For you act in direct opposition to the rule of charity: "do unto others as you wish them to do unto you." Consider the matter fairly, and acknowledge the truth to your own conscience; would you be satisfied if others spoke of you in that way? if you were painted in such black colors? Would you like other people, to whom you are not at all answerable, to pry into your concerns, to watch all your actions, to keep a list of the persons with whom you associate, the places you visit, the conversations you hold, to interpret your behavior, your faults and failings according to their own ideas, and to make sport of them with others, to laugh at and ridicule them? Even if your faults are known to many, would you like to have them frequently spoken of, so as to keep them fresh in people's memories? But if you do not wish that to be done to you, you must be careful not to do it to others.

4. "Judge not, that you may not be judged; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7 : 1, 2). If you wish to give your neighbor his due, and to practise the charity you owe him; if you wish to be friends and followers of Jesus Christ; if you wish to stand well with God at the judgment-seat, then you must never judge ill of another, and much less say anything to his detriment. Do not meddle with the affairs of others. If curiosity should prompt you to inquire what this or that person has said or done, if the slippery tongue is on the point of criticising others, restrain it, reprove it in the words in which Christ reproved Peter when the latter was too anxious to find out what was to become of John: "What is it to thee? follow me." What hast thou to do with the faults of others? Art thou created for no other purpose but to criticise them? Look after yourself and your own soul; that is all that

God requires of you. Thus you should criticise your own actions, and see whether they are good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible. According to the beautiful exhortation of St. Paul: "Let every one prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another" (Gal. 6 : 4, 5); that is a matter that concerns us all, but we have nothing to do with the actions of others, for whom we are not responsible to God. "For every one shall bear his own burden;" every one will have to give an account of his own works, and according to them he shall be either punished or rewarded.

Let us act like the Apostles at the Last Supper, when Christ told them that one of them was about to betray him. "And they, being very much troubled, began to say: Is it I, Lord?" (Matt. 26 : 22.) Not one asked, is it my neighbor? Is it Peter, Andrew, or Judas? But each one was afraid that he himself might be the unhappy traitor. "Is it I, Lord?" Oh, if every one were to attend to himself and to his own faults and sins, how much would he not find to blame and condemn! He would soon see that he is like a traveler who is carrying a bag on his back, and who can see only what is before him, but not the load of sins he himself is carrying. You know how Christ acted when the Pharisees brought before him the woman taken in adultery, and said to him that she should be stoned: "Jesus, bowing himself down, wrote with his finger on the ground" (John 8 : 6); that is, he wrote on the ground their secret sins. "When, therefore, they continued asking him, he lifted himself up and said to them: he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8 : 7). How astonished they must have been when they heard of this! They slunk away one after the other, like thieves caught in the act; not one of them dared to cast a stone at the guilty woman. Oh, if that same finger were to write down the sins and daily faults of each one of us, so that we could see them, then indeed we should be silent about others, and not be so ready to find fault with and to

cast stones at our neighbor; we should then leave him in peace, and try to rectify our own misdeeds!

5. If you sometimes hear talk of that kind in company, act as if you did not know what the talk is about; for if you listen to it, and show that you take pleasure in it, you co-operate in the sin and in the injury done to charity. Therefore, if you have any authority over those who are finding fault with their neighbor, you must exercise it, and say to them with a holy zeal: What is that to you? If they are not subject to you, although they are your inferiors, you must modestly say to them: What is that to me? I know nothing about the matter, nor do I concern myself with the affairs of other people; or else you may say: If you wish to praise another in my hearing, I will listen to you; but I have no ears for fault-finding.

Finally, you who are exposed to the criticisms and fault finding of others, be not disturbed at it; let people think and say of you what they please; if you are guilty of what they accuse you, humble yourselves, acknowledge that you deserve to be found fault with, and resolve to amend. If you give reasonable grounds for suspicion or for unfavorable judgments of your conduct, you are bound in conscience to remove that stumbling block out of the way of others. If you are innocent, then be comforted! You are not the only one; you have countless companions who must bear patiently similar criticisms of their conduct; the saint who is free from them has yet to be born. Continue, then, to live as true Christians; say confidently with St. Paul: "But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by any other man's day;" it does not trouble or concern me in the least that men should condemn me; I seek not their favor, nor do I fear their displeasure; "but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4 : 3, 4). He can see into my heart, of which men know nothing; they may now condemn my actions behind my back, but by and by they will not be my judges; there is One who will judge me, and he will judge them, too,

and their talk. To him I appeal; to him I entrust my cause; if he does not speak against me, then my affairs are prospering, even if the whole world were to look on me as the greatest malefactor. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR IS VERY SMALL.

"*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"—Matth. 22 : 39.

This is the great law of Charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor;" these words teach us whom we are to love. "As thyself;" how and in what manner we are to love. This law, though well known by all, is understood by very few; for most people show by their conduct that they know little of what is meant by that law. There are many nowadays who ask with the lawyer: "And who is my neighbor?" So rare is the true love of one's neighbor that people neither know nor care to know who their neighbor is; still less do they know what it means to love him as themselves. Since so much depends on the fulfilment of this law that without it it is impossible to love God, I shall endeavor to explain it to-day:

I. Who my neighbor is.

II. What it means to love one's neighbor as one's self.

"And who is my neighbor?" Is it only my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends and relatives? No, although all these are closely related to you, there is still another who is a close connection of yours, and who has a valid claim on your love. "There is no relationship so close as that

which exists between man and man!" Whoever, therefore, in the whole wide world has human nature, is a neighbor of all of us, no matter who or what he is. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor;" this is a general law binding all men, which admits of no exception. It says to you and to me, and to us all: "Thou shalt love:" whom? "Thy neighbor." And who is he? Every human being, without exception; because we all belong to the same race; we have all the same origin, the nothingness of which we are created; the same Creator, who is the Almighty God; the same nature, which is the likeness of God; the same Father, who is in heaven; the same Mother, the true Church, to which all men are called; the same spiritual food and drink, which is prepared for all, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; the same hope, the same end, the same inheritance, the same heaven. God, in order to preserve this fellowship amongst men, and thereby to foster mutual charity amongst them, did not create the great and the rich out of one material and the poor and needy of another, but he caused us all, without exception, to descend from the one father, Adam, and our first mother, Eve. He did not create her independently, but took the material of which he made her from Adam, so that no one can treat another as a stranger, and no difference of nationality, family, condition, or manners, which generally is a cause of misunderstanding and difficulties, can excuse us from the obligation of loving all human beings, and looking on them as our brothers and sisters.

How rare is true charity amongst us; for what is more difficult to find than this general love? What a circumscribed meaning is given nowadays to the word neighbor! Into what small parts we divide, and how miserly we are in doling out, our love and friendship! I find only three classes of men who receive any share of it. The first class founds its claim on blood-relationship, and consists of those who belong to the same family as we do; the second relies on our own interest,

and consists of those who have done us good, or are likely to do us good; the third and principal class consists of those who suit our natural inclination, because they are beautiful or amiable in our eyes, or are endowed with great natural gifts and talents, or have a pleasing manner, or a sympathetic disposition, or because we have a special pleasure in the society of those of whose favor and friendship we are assured. These are the people who generally monopolize our hearts and affections, and all the others are excluded; no one thinks of them. Hence, as there are few in the world who are related to us, fewer still from whom we have received or expect to receive benefits, and fewest of all who, without any fault or failing, are perfectly suited to our inclination, it follows clearly that the number of human beings in the world whom we love properly is very small indeed.

A clear example of our conduct in this particular I find in the First Book of Kings, in Nabal. He was a wealthy man, but very hard-hearted, unmerciful, and wicked. David, who, with his followers, happened to be in his neighborhood, sent to him to ask him in a friendly manner for provisions; but the churlish and foolish Nabal answered: "Who is David? and what is the son of Isai?" I know him not; what have I to do with him? "Shall I, then, take my bread and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are?" (1 Kings 25 : 10, 11.) That is generally the way in which we talk when there is question of showing charity, according to the Christian law, to the poor, the lowly, and the unknown. And when we are bound by that law to speak and act in a friendly manner to them, to do them a kindness, and to help them in their necessities—what, we say, who are they? They are nothing to me; I know not where they come from; I have never had anything to do with them; why should I do them a kindness? What! you do not know where they come from? Do you know where you

come from yourself? As to your soul, you come from nothing, and so do they; as to your body, you are made of a handful of earth, so are they; you come from the hand of God your Creator, and so do they; you know not where they come from? Do you know where you and they are going to? Every day you are going to death, and so are they; you are hurrying on to eternity, nor have they any other end; you hope to get to heaven, so do they, and perhaps they will succeed and you will be disappointed; you are all in the same danger; you have all the same hope, and therefore you are in the same condition, and you owe them the Christian and brotherly love of charity, as well as you owe it to your friends and relatives.

On the last day Christ will reckon up all the works of Christian charity that have been performed, in order to reward them duly. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me" (Matt. 25 : 34, 36). And all this "you did to me" (Ibid. 40), and for my sake. Now, come forward with that love of yours and hear judgment pronounced on it. You have done good to your neighbor, but why? Because you were in want of his help or assistance? But Christ will say to you, if you had no other object but that: you did it not to me, but to yourself and for your own end. You have visited a sick person; why? Through worldly courtesy, because he was an acquaintance of yours, or because you considered his friendship useful to you, or because you expected him to remember you in his will? If that was your only intention, you have not visited me. You have given alms to a poor man; why? That he might work for you? You have not given it to me. You have clothed one who was naked; why? Because he was your relative, or a countryman of yours? Then you have not clothed me. You have borne an insult meekly

and silently, or been patient with the troublesome faults of another, or repressed your anger when he contradicted or spoke harshly to you; why? Because he was stronger than you, or you were afraid of incurring his resentment? You did it not to me; it was not for my sake that you were so patient. You helped one who was in need by your interest, good advice, or consolation; why? Because you had a natural liking for him? You did it not to me. You were good-humored, friendly and agreeable with that person; why? Because he pleased you? Then you have not sought to please me by your conduct to him. In a word, if you have loved your neighbor because he pleased you, and loved you in return, you did it not for me, not for my sake. If you had done all this on my account and in obedience to my command, you would have loved all men without exception, because I commanded you to love your neighbor, that is, all mankind. And how are we to love all mankind?

II. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" not with exactly the same affection that you have for yourself. No; for well-ordered charity begins with one's self. To sacrifice one's property, to shed one's blood, to give one's life for another, is often the effect of a heroic charity, but is seldom a duty or an obligation. I can love myself more than others in temporal things, and I must love myself more than all others in things that concern my eternal salvation. The law of charity, then, points to a certain likeness and similarity, so that the love I bear to myself should guide me as to the love I must have for my neighbor. The Holy Scripture, in order to guard us from error on this point, lays down two very clear rules, one of which shows us what we have to avoid, the other what we have to do. The first was given by the elder Tobias to his son: "See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another" (Tob. 4 : 16). The second was given by our Lord Jesus Christ to his Apostles: "All things, therefore, what-

soever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law" (Matt. 7 : 22); that is the way to love your neighbor as yourself.

But do we observe that? I find two classes of people who err grievously in this matter; for some are too prodigal of their love, and others are too miserly with it; some do too much, others too little; some love their neighbor more, others less than themselves.

1. You say or do something unlawful, to please another; you love your neighbor too much, more than yourself. To avoid displeasing another you omit doing or saying what the duties of your state oblige you to do or say; you love that person too much, more than yourself. To avoid interrupting a conversation, you join in and approve of impure or uncharitable talk; you love others too much, more than yourself. Through human respect you transgress the law of God; you love others too much, more than yourself. A father scrapes together all the money he can, and even tries to get possession of what he has no right to, that at his death he may leave his dear son well off. Father, you love your son too much, more than yourself! A mother, not wishing to displease her daughter, allows her to keep dangerous company, to be present at promiscuous nightly gatherings, and to go into other occasions of sin. Mother, you love your daughter too much, more than yourself! Neither father nor mother will punish their children when they do wrong, nor do they bring them up in the fear of God, or teach them how to work for the salvation of their souls, and thus they fail in performing the most important duty that God has imposed on those who enter the married state. Parents, you love your children too much, more than yourselves! In a word, he who commits even a single sin, or omits one good action to please another, sins against the law of charity by prodigality. And why? Because he loves his neighbor, not as himself, but more than himself, more than his conscience, his soul,

his salvation, his God; or, as the Gospel says, he hates himself mortally, that he may love another foolishly and unreasonably. And how many people of that kind there are in the world! I might look for a long time, and I should hardly find one in thousands who would be willing to share his wealth with me through Christian charity; and there is many a one who would find hundreds ready to sacrifice their consciences, their souls, their salvation, for his sake. All these people love others too much, more than themselves.

2. But there are others who love their neighbor far too little. I think a great deal of myself, feel the least slight very keenly, have a vain complacency in all my undertakings, and am firmly persuaded that everything I do is well done; meanwhile I look down upon all that another does, and I despise him in my heart, I criticise and find fault with him, and put a bad interpretation on all his actions; it is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am so sensitive that I cannot bear the least word of contradiction, and yet I speak to another very bitterly and sarcastically; I do not love him as myself. I often complain that this or that person has refused to do me a kindness; yet I hardly ever do anything for another person who asks me to help him; I do not love him as myself. I wish that people should bear everything from me, but I cannot bear the least thing from them; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am often vexed during the day at the natural faults and awkwardness of another, and I have many great faults which others must overlook patiently and meekly; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I abhor and condemn many men because they are wicked and sinful, but I do not hate and condemn the sins which I myself commit every day; I do not love my neighbor as myself. When others do wrong I wish to see them severely punished, but I do not punish myself; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am naturally kind to myself; why am I not so to others? I am naturally severe and harsh to others; why am I

not so to myself? It is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself.

Indeed, we have very little love for our neighbor, although we are bound to love him; and we are far from loving him as we ought. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ has told us clearly, emphatically, and frequently, that we are bound to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Gospels and the Epistles are full of the laws of charity. "These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15 : 17). This was the last prayer of our Lord to his heavenly Father when he was about to take leave of his Apostles: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are" (John 17 : 11). This was his last exhortation to his Apostles, and in their person to all of us: "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Alas! where is the fervor of the early Christians, who were so exact in fulfilling this law? The Christian faith was known in those days more by the brotherly love of charity it produced than by the miracles it wrought; for, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, in spite of the differences of race and nationality, "the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them." This fact alone convinced the heathens of the truth of the Christian religion, and they used to say to each other with astonishment: "See how those men love one another." If the heathens were to come into many modern Christian towns would they see the same proof of the truth of our religion? Could they say with truth: "See how those men love one another"? Would they not rather have reason to think and to say: See how those men hate each other? See what misunderstandings, quarrels and dis-

putes there are amongst them! See how they curse, and persecute, and try to ruin each other!

Do you think you love God if you hate even one man? St. John will tell you that, if you think so, you are a liar. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." And do you think that God loves you? You are mistaken; for if a man love not his brother, "how doth the charity of God abide in him?" Of what use will all your devotions and good works be if you do not love your neighbor? If you do not love him as yourself? "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (1 John 4 : 14). If you gave up all you have in order to follow Jesus; if you scourged yourself every day for his sake, so as to draw blood, what good would it all be to you if you love not your neighbor? Not the least; you can save your soul and be loved by God without this poverty and all these extraordinary austerities and devotions. But unless you love your neighbor you can hope neither to save your soul nor to gain his love. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

BLASPHEMY.

"*He blasphemeth.*"—Matth. 9 : 3.

On other occasions, influenced by hatred and envy, the Jews had called him a disturber of the people, a drunkard, a sorcerer, who drove out devils in the name of the devil, but all these accusations were as nothing compared to that of being a blasphemer—that is, one who assails the Almighty, who is worthy of infinite honor and glory, with curses and injurious expressions. I will take occasion from the Gospel of to-day to speak of this fearful sin, which is so common unfortunately, in order

to inspire you with such a horror of this crime that you will be shocked at the very name of it.

I. What is blasphemy?
II. What a terrible sin it is.

I. Curses are often uttered in anger and impatience which ignorant people sometimes look upon as blasphemies, but wrongly; and there are many expressions in vogue which seem to be pious, but in reality are blasphemous. To be able, then, to make the necessary distinction, we must first answer this question: In what does the sin of blasphemy consist? It consists in using injurious or dishonoring expressions toward God, which assail any of his essential perfections, or affirm of him something unworthy of his supreme majesty, or attribute to creatures what belongs to him alone.

The first kind of blasphemy is committed by those unfortunate, miserable and wretched men who, on account of losses, accidents, trials, and miseries, murmur against divine Providence, and break out into the following or similar complaints: Oh, there is no justice in heaven any more; God has forgotten me; he seems to take a pleasure in tormenting me; he cannot cause me greater torment that he is causing me now. What have I done that he should treat me so cruelly? I have not sold Christ, at any rate; I have more to suffer than I deserve. Things have come to such a pass with me now that God can no longer help me. I will not pray any more, nor do any good works, for God will not hear me in any case. All expressions of this kind are grievous blasphemies, because they attack the infinite wisdom, power, goodness, mercy and justice of God. There are others whose blasphemous tongues assail the all-wise and inscrutable arrangements of God's Providence. Why, they think or say, should God look after me always? He has enough to do without taking such interest in me and my belongings. God has not made a fair division of worldly goods;

he gives one too much, another too little, and nothing at all to a third; one must suffer hunger, while another has abundance of everything. God is not just in allowing that good and pious man to suffer so many afflictions, while he neglects to punish that worthless and wicked fellow. It seems that he who serves the devil is better off and happier than he who is faithful to God. It is easy to say that I must abandon myself to the arrangements of God's Providence; if I do not make my own fortune I need not expect much from them. People who indulge in blasphemy of this kind appear to think that they can govern the world better than the Almighty; like the wicked king Alphonsus, who used to say in his foolish pride: "If I had been God's counsellor in the creation, I could have suggested many improvements to him."

2. To the second class of blasphemers, that is, to those who attribute something false or unbecoming to God, belong those who say, for instance, when it thunders: Now God is playing skittles; or, the drums are beating in heaven; or, heaven is falling to pieces. Such people say sometimes to one who is praying: Oh, you are annoying God; let him have a little rest; he has something else to do besides hearing what you have to say. If one is anxious about the future, they say, oh, leave it to God; he had a wise mother. To the same class belong those who attribute to creatures what belongs only to God or to his Saints; this is done by way of showing affection, when some miserable creature is called by another his god, his divinity, his chief treasure, his adorable; or in the expressions, as true as God lives, as true as Gospel, I am as innocent as the Virgin Mary. Although these latter expressions may be excused from blasphemy, still they are not becoming, and they are injurious to God, because they affirm a human and fallible truth with a certainty that belongs only to divine truth.

3. To the third class belong those who, in cursing others, wish that they may be destroyed and ruined by what God has

appointed for our welfare and eternal salvation. For instance, may the Blood of Christ, or the Death of Christ, or the Sacrament strike you dead. In a word, all expressions that contain contempt of God or of divine things, whether they are true or false; as, for example: The man above is not of that kind; God is a good man; God is a cunning politician; God knows me well, and he will not do anything to me; the weather-man above must give us a good season. Again, there are people, such as half-atheists and desperate characters, who say: I will believe and live as I will, and then God must give me the place in heaven that I wish to have; St. Peter and I are well acquainted; he will not fail to let me in when I knock at the gate of heaven; what have I to do amongst the beggars and other low people in heaven? I will find far more respectable company in hell. All these expressions are disrespectful to God and to divine things. In this, then, consists the sin of blasphemy. And what sort of a sin is it? The most fearful of all.

II. We can deduce the grievous malice of a sin from three circumstances:

1. When we consider who it is who is thereby attacked and offended;

2. Who it is who offers the offence;

3. Why is it that the offence is offered? From these three circumstances we shall see that blasphemy is a fearful sin.

1. Who is thereby attacked and dishonored? It is no other than the God of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, who is worthy of all honor and reverence, in whose honor thousands of happy princes of heaven, Cherubim and Seraphim, with faces veiled through respect, sing their song of praise: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the heavens and the earth are full of thy glory." This God is attacked, dishonored and insulted by the blasphemous tongue. And the insult is offered to him directly. God is dishonored by every sin, as St. Paul says: "Thou, by pre-

varication of the law, dishonorest God." Oh, man! do you think of what you do when you commit a sin, no matter what it is? You dishonor God, because you refuse to do as he wishes you to do.

But there is a great difference between blasphemy and other sins. Other vices are confined, so to speak, to God's creatures. Pride is a great vice, by which one arrogates to himself praise and honor that do not belong to him, and looks down haughtily on others. Injustice is a great sin, for by it the property of others is stolen and kept. Impurity is a great sin, which defiles both body and soul. Drunkenness is a great sin, by which a man deliberately deprives himself of the use of reason. Anger, hatred, envy, revenge, persecution, injuring others, detraction, cursing and swearing, all these are great sins, by which one gives vent to his ill feelings against the servants of God. But it still remains true that all these sins appear small when compared to blasphemy, for that is the only most terrible sin which attacks God himself directly and dishonors him.

2. Who is it that dares to offer it? I might ask, like the Pharisee: Who speaketh blasphemies? It is a poor mortal, a worm of the earth. Yes, he who is rottenness, and the son of man is a worm (Luke 5 : 21). He who is utterly powerless, and who must depend on God for everything, dares to open his insolent mouth against heaven, and to use the tongue which he cannot even move without God's help in cursing and reviling the Almighty! And what kind of men are they who are guilty of such a grievous crime? Are they Turks, heathens, or idolaters? It would be less intolerable on the part of such as those. "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it," is the complaint that our Lord makes by the Psalmist: "And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hid myself from him" (Ps. 54 : 13). But they are Christians, brought up in the house and true Church of God,

who have been consecrated in Baptism as friends and children of God, relations and brethren of Jesus Christ, who often eat the bread of Angels, his flesh, at the table of the Lord, and who are called to be heirs of the kingdom of heaven. They are Christians who, in preference to all other people, receive abundant graces and benefits every day, every hour, every moment, from God. And I ask, must Christians revile God, blaspheme him and curse him? The Turks are severely punished if they mention even the name of their prophet Mahomet in anger; nay, although they are sworn enemies of the Christian religion, they dare not curse by the name of Jesus Christ, whom they reverence as a great prophet. But Christians, who adore Jesus Christ as their God, who uncover their heads and bend the knee whenever his Holy Name is mentioned, treat that Name so disrespectfully, revile and blaspheme it, whenever they get in the least passion, or anything is said or done to vex them!

3. And why should we give way to blasphemy? Oh, my God! says St. Augustine, with bitter tears, how is it possible for a man to be so wicked as to seek nothing by sinning but to sin against and offend thee? Is a man given to the lusts of the flesh? Alas, there is nothing wonderful in that! Corporal beauty and sensual pleasure are very powerful attractions, that offer a gentle violence to the human heart. Is a man given to avarice and injustice? He is blinded by a love of riches, which will help him to supply all his wants. Is a man ambitious? The mind is easily captivated by the praise of others and by the desire of their esteem. And yet, although we are born with those inclinations, not one of them should be sufficient to induce us to sin. But alas, it is for the purpose of satisfying those inclinations that sin is committed! Ask one who has killed another why he has done so. Either to get his money, he will answer, or through fear of being injured by him, or through desire of revenge and having satisfaction for an insult. If he were to say that he knows not why he killed the man, unless it

was to have the pleasure of killing him, we should hardly believe him. Such are the words in which St. Augustine bewails the sin of theft that he committed in his youth by stealing berries out of a garden, not through fondness for them, but through sheer love of mischief. And it is in that way, but very much worse, that blasphemers act whenever they speak so as to dishonor God; for there is nothing whatever to impel them to such a sin but a desire of reviling and insulting the Almighty. Tell me, blasphemer, what pleasure or profit do you find in speaking so disrespectfully of God, in cursing by the holy Sacraments, or by the Blood and Death of Jesus Christ, in treating the divine Majesty so contemptuously, or in making such a profane use of the Word of God Do you find any bodily pleasure in it? Does it make you richer or more influential in the world? You gain nothing of the kind. What, then, induces you to commit such a fearful sin? Nothing but your more than diabolical malice in venting your anger against your Creator.

Wretched mortal, what harm has your Creator done you? Has he ill-treated you, that you thus revile him and insult him? "Oh, my people," he asks by the prophet Micheas, "what have I done to thee, or in what have I molested thee? answer thou me." Dear Christians, whom I have purchased with my precious Blood, what harm have I done you? Have I ever given you the least cause to be angry with me, that you now attack me and my name so fiercely? Have I not given you countless proofs of the most tender, fatherly love? I never cease doing good to you for a moment, and, ungrateful mortals that you are, you repay my benefits by such shameful injuries. "For seventy years," says St. Polycarp, when his persecutors tried to induce him to deny God, "God has done me nothing but good; why should I deny him?" Blasphemous Christians, how many years of your lives are now past, during which you have been enjoying the benefits bestowed on you by God?

How can you dare to blaspheme his holy Name? No tyrant threatens you with torture, there is neither wheel, nor gallows, nor sword, nor lance, nor rack, nor gridiron to force you to forswear your God and curse him; there is no one in the world who threatens you with death, no one who promises you either pleasure or profit; there is nothing that can compel or induce you to blaspheme, and yet you insult God so grossly! Your sin, then, can only proceed from sheer diabolical malice. Nay, from more than diabolical malice, for the devils tremble at the name of Jesus. It may be that the demons in hell are always blaspheming God; still the blasphemies of men are more wicked and less to be excused. For when the demons blaspheme, they do it only in thought and desire; while you, oh, man, do it with thought and word! The reprobate curse God on account of the severe tortures they have to suffer; and there is pity for the wretch who is impaled alive, or broken on the wheel. But you, oh, Christian, who have received nothing but benefits from God, what reason have you to offend him by your blasphemous tongue? Amen.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MALICE OF IRREVERENCE IN CHURCH, AND THE PUNISHMENT IT DESERVES.

"*How camest thou in hither?*"—Matt. 22 : 12.

What a severe Judge! What a terrible punishment to inflict on the poor man! What had he done? He had come to the marriage-feast, without having on a wedding garment. That was his whole crime. If that is the case, how will it then be with those who appear, I will not say without decent clothes,

but with a disrespectful demeanor, in the house of the great King of heaven, to which the faithful come, either to receive holy communion or to hear Mass or the Word of God in sermons? Christ Jesus, who is bodily present in our churches, and who sees not only the outward behavior, but the most secret thoughts of men, how many there are who enter his house and who remain in it to whom he could say, with just resentment: "How camest thou in hither," dressed as frivolously as if going to a dancing-house? How camest thou in hither, without bending the knee and showing me proper honor? How camest thou in hither, to talk and chat, as if you were on the market-place? How camest thou in hither, to allow your eyes to indulge in impure glances? How camest thou in hither, to approach my table with a conscience stained with mortal sin? Quick, ye Angels! bind the hands and feet of this impious man who dishonors my house, and "cast him into the exterior darkness." Yes, so it will be one day with all who in any way are irreverent in the church of God. A sin that we generally think little of, although by it the Almighty is treated with the greatest contempt, so that he punishes it with the greatest severity, as I shall now show.

Irreverence in the church of God is an act of the greatest contempt toward God, which he, in his anger, punishes most severely.

Every sin implies a dishonor and a contempt of God, since a miserable mortal dares to rebel against his Almighty Lord and God, and to trample his law under foot. Therefore every sin merits the just anger and vengeance of God to such a degree that, if it is a mortal sin, and is not repented of, it deserves no less a punishment than eternal fires amongst the demons in hell.

1. The whole world belongs to God, and he has given it to men, to do with it what they please. They can build houses to

live in, courts of justice to settle their disputes, markets and shops to buy and sell, streets to walk on, while they can use the mighty ocean to transport their merchandise from one place to another, and they have besides fields and forests, mountains and valleys, gardens and meadows for their support, business and amusement. The churches alone God has reserved for himself, to receive therein due homage and adoration from men. Although the whole world belongs to God, he is satisfied with the church alone as his dwelling-place, as he said to Solomon: "I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that my name may be there forever, and my eyes and my heart may remain there perpetually" (2 Par. 7 : 16). I do not allow any one to use this place for any other purpose, except to do homage to me.

2. It is true that the great King of heaven is present in all places, and that honor and reverence are everywhere due to him; but he dwells in the church as in his palace, where he is seated on his throne, that he may be seen and adored by all. When I am in the church I am in a holy place, where the same God who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai still declares his law to the people; in a place where I can adore the same Lord and Saviour who was adored in the stable at Bethlehem; in a place where sins are forgiven by the same merciful Lord who went about formerly in search of sinners; in a place where that loving Lord gives as our food and drink the same Flesh and Blood which he gave to his Apostles at the Last Supper in Jerusalem; in a place where the holy sacrifice of Calvary, in which the Son of God was offered on the Cross as a Victim to his heavenly Father, is renewed daily, in which the same Precious Blood still flows for us that was shed on the Cross. Ah, when we think of this, should we not cry out, like the patriarch Jacob, when he saw the ladder on which the Angels were ascending and descending: "How terrible is this place! this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of

heaven. Indeed the Lord is in this place" (Gen. 28 : 17, 18).

Now, to be disrespectful to God, to be in any way wanting in reverence to him in such a holy place, is not that to insult and offend the Majesty of God, which deserves infinite honor and love, on his very throne, in his own palace? Therefore, is it not to offer God the greatest possible insult? And can a Catholic dare to do this? Or if any one is so foolhardy, can the all-seeing God allow such conduct to remain unpunished? A Catholic, I say; for I dare not even accuse heathens and idolaters of such a crime toward their false gods of wood and stone. I feel ashamed when I read what Seneca says of the humility, modesty and reverence which the Romans observed in former days in the temples of their gods.

A Turk was once urged by a zealous missionary to embrace Christianity. No, said he, defiantly (and his answer may well put some of us to shame), I will never embrace your religion; I cannot, and must not do so. And why not? Because you Catholics either believe what you all profess, that God is really present in your churches, or else you do not. If you do not believe it, your religion is a mere hypocrisy; if you do believe that you adore the true God, to whom the highest reverence is due, and yet with such disrespect behave so badly in his presence, as I myself have seen in your churches, where people appeared dressed in a frivolous style, talking, laughing, staring about them, hardly bending a knee, or stretching out a hand to God, even while their lips were moving in prayer—if, I say, you behave like that, even while the sacrifice you call so holy is being offered, and while your God is elevated to be adored, then, if you still believe in God, you must be the most wicked people on earth. Therefore I will never belong to a religion in which God is so shamefully treated in his own house.

Now, what have you to say to this? Can you deny his accusation and the conclusion he lawfully derives from it? Do not people behave as badly as that, nay, even worse, in many of

our churches? It the Turk had been able to see all the sin that is committed in our churches in thought and desire, nay, sometimes even by the outward senses, how would he not have been scandalized? Sins without number are committed in private houses, in dancing houses, in the public promenades, in public houses, in places of resort for young people of both sexes, in hidden corners, by day and by night. Not even the church, the holy house which God has reserved for himself, that he may receive due honor therein, is free from sin. Certainly those sins are concealed from the eyes of the pious, who, keeping themselves recollected as they ought, in the presence of God, are attending to their prayers and suspect no evil of others; but can they be hidden from the all-seeing eye of the God who is present? If Turks, heathens, or heretics were guilty of such wickedness, it might be tolerated to a certain extent; for they could excuse themselves, as people sometimes do, when they have not shown due respect to another. Oh, they say, I beg your pardon; I did not recognize you. Catholic people, who knew that he, the true God, was present amongst them, they are the guilty ones, and in his own house, too! Have they not room enough to commit sin elsewhere, that they must make choice of his house as a place in which to offend him?

3. A sin of that kind must be punished, even before the day of general punishment arrives. God has already announced his determination by St. Paul: "If any man violate the Temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. 3 : 17). Did not the city of Jerusalem feel that punishment often enough? Jerusalem was the favored and chosen city of God, the holy city; nevertheless, how often has not that city been destroyed and laid waste. It was taken and plundered by Sesac, the king of Egypt; it was plundered by Joas, king of Israel; Nabuchodonosor attacked and took it twice; it was taken by Antiochus, the Illustrious, and afterwards by Jason; it was captured and sacked by another Antiochus, until at last it was completely de-

stroyed by the Romans. And why was that? If God loved that city, why did he deliver it so often into the hands of its enemies? Did not its magnificent Temple consecrated to God help to save it from destruction? nor its altar? nor its tabernacle, nor the Holy of holies, nor the many sacrifices that were offered in it? No; the Temple itself was plundered, burnt and destroyed along with the city; the altar and tabernacle were carried off, and all sacrifice ceased. And why was that? The three Hebrew youths walked about unhurt in the midst of the flames of the furnace in Babylon, because the Almighty, in order to preserve their lives, changed the heat of the fire into a gentle breeze. Could not the same God prevent his Temple from being burnt? Certainly he could have done so, but God wished to teach the world that he has no pleasure in the beautiful stones and gilded walls of a temple made by hands: but in faith, and charity, and purity of heart. The three youths were full of piety and the fear of the Lord, therefore God dwelt in them, and protected his dwelling from the flames; but in the Temple at Jerusalem he saw all kinds of sin and abomination, with which the Jews dishonored it, and, as a punishment of their crime, he allowed it to be destroyed, although it had been consecrated to him.

4. Now, if God acts with such rigor toward his own churches because they are profaned by men, what refuge can they hope to find in the church, or rather what a terrible chastisement will they not have to expect who profane the church by their irreverence and by many sins? The church will help them as little as the tabernacle helped Core and his companions, whom the earth swallowed up before the very tabernacles; as little as the Temple sheltered Joab, who was slain as he was embracing the altar with both arms; as little as the ark protected the Israelites, when thirty thousand of them were slain around it. For such contempt of God cannot but draw down severe punishment. If we knew the judgments of God, could we be surprised that

God so often visits us with private and public calamities? If no other sin was committed, the profanations and sins that are committed in the churches by word and thought, I will not say by act, would be enough to draw down the anger of God.

Is it to be wondered at that the prayers we offer up in our necessities before the altar of Jesus Christ are so seldom heard? For we insult God by profaning the place in which he would otherwise hear our prayers, according to his promise. No; he is carrying out the threat he uttered long ago: "And when they shall cry to my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." When they are under the pressure of difficulty and in danger of losing a great part of their property, when a decision is about to be given against them to their great detriment, when husband, or wife, or only child, whose help they are in need of, grows dangerously sick even to death, they will run to the church and cry out for mercy with a loud voice, with outstretched hands, on bended knees, and prostrate on the ground; but he will not hear them; he is determined to close his ears to all their prayers and supplications! They will redouble their prayers, promise amendment, go on pilgrimages, make vows, burn candles, have Masses said, and get prayers said in convents; but he will not hear them; he will not pay the least attention to them; the misfortune that threatens them will surely happen; they will lose their case, the husband, or wife, or child, will die. But, oh, Lord, after so many prayers, sacrifices, and promises? Yes, no matter what they do, God says, I will not hear them. I will despise all their prayers and cries, and that because they have so often despised me in the same churches!

I trust that this threat will not be carried into effect against any of you who are here present, and that my whole sermon may be necessary simply as a salutary warning never to forget the reverence you owe to the house of God. In future, when you are going to church, think on the way of the great God whom you are going to adore; and while in the church, keep

up a lively recollection of the great Monarch of heaven, and imagine that you are quite alone with him, so that the thoughts of others may not distract you. If any one attempts to disturb you by the ordinary greetings or salutations, or by talking, give them, more by silence and modest demeanor than by words, the same answer that Ferdinand II., Archduke of Austria, whispered into the ear of a certain prince, who spoke to him in church: "Let us pray, that we may not give scandal to the devout people;" lest they should think we did not know what reverence is due to God, who is here present. In a word, always appear in church with such inward and outward humility, and so watch over your eyes and hands, over the postures of your bodies and the thoughts of your hearts, that you may not make the house of God a house of destruction for yourselves, but that you may one day acknowledge with joy and gladness, that you have found in that house the eternal salvation of your souls. Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE INCURABLENESS OF THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

"*For he was at the point of death.*"—John 4 : 47.

That is a time when one requires help, when one is at the point of death. But it is also a time when great skill is required to help; and it is a certain sign that a disease is incurable when nothing but a miracle on the part of God can cure it. With reason, then, did the ruler, in to-day's Gospel, beg of our Lord to come: "Lord, come down, before that my son die;" there is no time for delay, because he has already begun to breathe his last. A malady of that kind is impurity, and it is an incurable

and desperate malady, so that he who is infected with it has already begun to die an eternal death. For when it has once become deep-rooted it can hardly be cured, unless by a miracle of divine grace. The reason of that is—

I. There is no vice which so binds the human understanding.

II. No vice which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity.

I. Zeuxis once painted a picture of a young man carrying grapes so naturally that the birds came and pecked at the canvas, thinking that the grapes were real. All who saw the picture praised it, and wondered at the skill of the artist. Zeuxis alone was dissatisfied at it, on account of a great fault he observed in it. And what fault was that? If, he said, the grapes are painted so well that the birds come and peck at them, the boy who is carrying them must be very badly painted, or else the birds would be afraid to come so near him. Now, what do I mean by this? A similar picture is drawn before the human understanding by sensual desires; but they paint in vivid colors only what is pleasing and flattering to the senses; so that the ardent desire of enjoying those pleasures may not be interfered with by shame or fear.

Meanwhile, all the bitterness and torment that such pleasures cause, and everything that could frighten men away from them, is carefully kept in the background, so that the understanding is blinded, and neither sees nor desires to see any of those deterrent causes; nay, once it has become enslaved by impurity, it is incapable of seeing or recognizing them. Thus, the impure man is not frightened by the omnipresence and omnipotence of God, from whom nothing is concealed, and who can annihiliate him in an instant, during the actual commission of his shameful crime; nor by the uncertainty of death, which may surprise him in the midst of his wickedness, and hand him over

to the devil, as it has done with many already; nor by the strictness of divine justice, before which even the Saints have trembled, and which he may have to face with his sin still fresh upon him; nor by the thought of the beauty and endless joys of heaven, which he barters so miserably for a momentary gratification; nor by the terrors of hell, which follow on the loss of heaven; it is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of burning in a fire forever, without any hope of being released! Yes, these are truths which he often thought of formerly, and they inspired him with a fear of sin; they caused him to feel a bitter remorse the first time he gratified his impure desires, and they kept him for a time in constant uneasiness; they are truths that can terrify any other sinner, no matter how wicked he is, and bring him to repentance and amendment of life.

But the unchaste man, who has become addicted to sensual pleasures, or who has been immeshed in the toils of an impure attachment for any creature, is no more impressed by those truths than he would be by the fables of the old pagan poets. He does not even think of them; if his blinded understanding is still capable of having a thought of the kind, he puts it away at once. He has no eyes, as St. Augustine, an experienced witness, says, for anything but the filth in which he is immersed.

What a holy and perfect man David was; a man after God's own heart, who always walked in the presence of God. David, I say, had hardly looked with a lustful eye on Bethsabee, and committed sin with her, when he spent a whole year without thinking of God, although after the death of Urias he had taken her to wife, and could have a lawful affection for her. So much was he infatuated with this vice that he did not even see how wicked he was until Nathan explained it to him by the well-known parable of the poor man's ewe lamb; then his eyes were opened, and he remembered his God, and how grievously he had sinned, and he cried out: "I have sinned against the Lord."

If there are any unfortunates here present who are victims of an unlawful passion, I call them all to witness if such is not their own experience? No matter how pious, devout and zealous they were in the divine service, as soon as they were ensnared by impurity, did they not at once lose all taste and inclination for piety and good works? It cannot be otherwise; for: "the sensual man perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand" (1 Cor. 2 : 14); the light of his understanding is gone out, and he no longer finds joy or pleasure in anything but the gratification of his brutish passion. While thus blinded, he pays no attention to his other duties and obligations; his honor and good name, his position and authority, his office and dignity, farewell to them all, once his desires get the upper hand. The father forgets what he owes his children, the child what he owes his parents; the husband forgets his wife, the wife her husband; the man of high position forgets the character he has to keep up before the people; the young man forgets his advancement, the young girl her virginal honor. All these things are utterly disregarded when unlawful love gains the upper hand.

In this blindness sins are heaped on sins with the utmost recklessness. The demon of impurity is called in Holy Scriptures, Asmodeus, which means in Hebrew, an abundance of sins; to signify that the unchaste body is like a heap of countless sins of all kinds. And such is really the case. The thief does not steal every day; the murderer is not always taking away people's lives; the passionate man is not always cursing and swearing; the vindictive man does not always seek revenge; the drunkard is not always intoxicated; but the impure man who is entangled in the snares of a guilty passion commits so many sins every day that his life is like a stormy sea, in which one mountain-wave of sin drives away another. We might say that with other vices the devil fishes for sins with a hook;

he has to wait a long time often, before the bait is taken; but with impurity he catches sins, as it were in a net, and by the hundred. If the impure man wishes to confess his sins, he cannot count them all; it is, humanly speaking, impossible to do so, and his confessor has only to ask how long, how many weeks, months or years he has been in the habit of impurity so as to be able to give a guess at the vast number of sins, thought, word, and deed, he has committed.

In this blindness there is no sin too great for the unchaste man to commit, if it is necessary to his ends; if it is required to make an enemy of his best friend, he does so; to trouble his brothers and sisters, he makes little scruple of that; to dishonor his father and mother, he does without hesitation; if he must keep up appearances by receiving the Sacraments sometimes, sacrilegious confessions, Communions, and Masses heard without profit, through want of true sorrow, are small matters to him. He has no respect for holy places consecrated to God, if he can there satisfy his lust by impure looks and desires. The blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle does not frighten him any more than if it were a dead thing; for in its very presence his heart is filled with filthy thoughts, and his eyes seek for new objects of gratification. Mention any of the greatest sins, such as murder, parricide, heresy, idolatry, which he is not ready to commit for the sake of his impure love.

King David, the holiest of men, imbrued his hands in the blood of Urias, his most faithful and innocent soldier, on account of an impure passion. King Solomon, whose wisdom the world wondered at, bent his knee before idols of wood and stone and offered incense to them; to such a degree of folly was he brought by impurity. Tertullian says of him: "Solomon lost the glory that he had with God, by women who brought him into idolatry."

II. As the will cannot work unless the understanding goes

before with its light and knowledge, it is evident that when the understanding is blinded to good, as is the case with those who are given to impurity, the will cannot be led on to good. There is a great difference between the maladies of the body and those of the soul; if I am attacked by a dangerous fever, I may be cured, although I know nothing of the nature of my illness; nay, even if through the violence of the disease I am utterly unconscious, it is enough if the doctor knows what to do to cure me. But if I am sick in the soul, that is, in the state of sin, it is not enough that God, the only Physician of souls, knows my miserable state and can cure it; I must first see the malice of my sin, and the misery of my condition, in order to help in the work of my cure by repentance and a purpose of amendment. But what hope of repentance can an unchaste man have? How can he have it, since he is so blinded that he does not even know the malice, misery and danger of his state, and therefore pays no attention to it?

Bad habits become a sort of necessity; but there is none that takes a quicker hold of the heart, strikes deeper root and lasts longer than impurity, when once one has become addicted to it. Have you never remarked what the ivy does to the oak? It first creeps over the outside of the bark, and as it gets stronger it grows into the oak and forms but one tree with it. Try now to separate them from each other, and you will find that you cannot tear down the ivy without bringing away the bark of the oak, and so killing it. So it is with carnal pleasures. The desires of them increase with continued indulgence until they become a second nature, so that it is easier to separate the soul from the body than to take them out of the heart. I know well that there is nothing impossible to the Almighty, but if anything were impossible to him it would be the conversion of one who is entangled in the meshes of an impure love; for what means could God use to bring him to true repentance, as long as he is in the occasion which foments his passion?

When Noe heard from God that the world was to be destroyed by a deluge, he did not have recourse to the divine mercy in prayer. Noe knew well that he was pleasing to God, and that his prayers would be heard; why, then, did he not try to avert such a terrible punishment from the human race? Could he not at least have asked God to mitigate it a little, and to destroy only some families? Certainly Moses acted quite differently when God in his anger threatened to destroy all the people of Israel, for he offered himself as a victim to appease the divine anger. Noe, on the contrary, never said a word to prevent the destruction of the whole world. This is the reason: The sin of the Israelites in the desert was idolatry, a far greater sin than impurity, but not so difficult to repent of and to avoid, and therefore, after the first promise on the part of Moses, idolatry disappeared. On the other hand, at the time of the deluge, the vice of impurity had gained the upper hand. Noe saw that there was no hope of repentance in such a case, and therefore he did not think it worth his while to pray. The event justified his anticipations, for we do not read of a single one being converted, in spite of the threatened punishment. Hence, all spiritual writers agree in saying that it requires a miracle of grace to make an unchaste man leave off his vicious habits and unlawful amours, and be really converted.

Unhappy people who are still living in sin, do not expect that God will give you a grace which he bestows upon hardly one in a hundred. Yet, what am I saying? You do not even wish for that grace! A physician once said to a sick man, who was asking him for something to allay his thirst: "Wait, and I will give you what you want." "Good," said the sick man; "but I do not wish the thirst to be taken away altogether." He wished to feel a little thirsty, that he might have more pleasure in drinking. So it is with the impure; they do not wish to be freed from their desires, that they may have the pleasure of gratifying them.

A girl who lived in improper intimacy with her intended husband (unfortunately such sins are only too common before marriage), God in his mercy sent her a dangerous illness, in order to put a stop to her crime; the illness lasted some months, so that she had time to repent. She profited by the opportunity and often renewed her sorrow and detestation of her sins, with a firm purpose of amendment. At last she asked her confessor's leave to speak to her partner in guilt, and to warn him to repent, that he might not lose his soul. The priest incautiously consented, not suspecting any evil, and suggested to her what she should say to warn him; but hardly had she laid eyes on her lover when she forgot all she had intended to say: the old, impure flame burst forth anew, and she cried out with all the strength she had left: I have always loved you with my whole heart, and it is now that I can best prove my love for you; I know that I am to be damned for your sake, but no matter; I am quite willing that it should be so. With these words she fell back exhausted and gave up her unhappy soul! The priest and the young man, who were standing by, were almost frightened out of their lives. Oh, desperate passion! "Oh, infernal flame of impure love!" which can hardly be extinguished until it is buried in the flames of hell.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE UNREASONABLENESS OF GIVING WAY TO ANGER AND THE BEST MEANS OF CONTROLLING IT.

"*And his Lord was angry.*"—Matt. 18 : 34.

This Lord had good reason to be angry with his wicked servant, who, although he was forgiven the enormous debt of ten thousand talents, yet acted so harshly with his fellow-servant, who owed him but a hundred pence, and who begged him in the most humble manner to have patience with him, that he had him cast into prison for the trifling debt. How often do not Christians give way to anger and resentment against their fellow-men, without the least cause, and without having ever suffered anything at their hands? How many are there who, when things do not go according to their wishes, at once give expression to the bitterest feelings against those whom they suspect to be the cause of their failure! Woe to such people, if the Almighty were to deal in a similar manner with them every time they offended him by sin, which they do daily! For, as our Lord says in to-day's Gospel: "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." If that threat is uttered against all who refuse to forgive those who have injured them, what will they have to expect who give way to anger against their neighbor on the least provocation, and make use of injurious and insulting words toward him? I will speak of this anger, which

I. Is a vice contrary to sound reason.

II. How we may and must control and repress the movements of anger as well in ourselves as in others.

I. The Lacedaemonians, in order to deter their children from the abominable vice of drunkenness, used to make their slaves drunk and bring their children in to see them in that state. Their disgusting appearance, their unbecoming gestures, their uncertain gait, their incoherent speech, and the other effects of intoxication that were observable in them, made the children look on them as a strange kind of wild animal. Thus from their very childhood the Lacedaemonians were filled with horror for a vice so unbecoming a reasoning being. In the same way, in order to see how anger is opposed to reason, we need only look at an angry man giving vent to his feelings. See how disturbed he looks; with his face alternately red and pale with passion, his eyes darting forth fire, his teeth grinding with rage, his lips compressed, his whole body trembling, his fist clenched, his tongue full of gall. Would not one have reason to think that he is completely mad and out of his mind, or else that he has been transformed into a wild beast? In fact, he is called a fool by the Holy Ghost in the Book of Ecclesiastes: "Be not quickly angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool;" and a savage and unreasoning beast, in the Book of Proverbs: "As the roaring of a lion, so is the anger of a king." Anger is a short-lived madness.

The cause of his anger is generally some worthless thing. Consider the anger and resentment of Achab; one would think that some terrible misfortune had befallen him; he became melancholy and refused to leave his bed; he would not touch food or drink, and did nothing but look at the bare wall. And why was he so distressed and disturbed? A rude answer was the only cause of his bitterness. Achab wished to purchase a certain vineyard; he sent for the owner, Naboth, and asked him

to exchange it with him. Naboth, instead of excusing himself in a polite manner, answered gruffly: "The Lord be merciful to me, and not let me give thee the inheritance of my fathers" (3 Kings 21 : 3, 4). "And Achab came into the house angry and fretting, because of the word that Naboth had spoken to him." He was not angry because of the deed, but because of the word. What great power a little word has on a passionate disposition! Was it worth while to get so angry for such a trifle, to throw himself on his bed and refuse to eat or drink? Seneca writes that Vedius Pollio once condemned a slave to be thrown into a fish-pond for having broken a glass vessel while waiting at table. Fortunately for the slave the Emperor Augustus was present, and he was so disgusted at the cruel sentence that he had the slave set free and ordered every glass vessel in Pollio's house to be broken, so that the latter might not have so many opportunities of giving way to anger, and of sacrificing human life for the sake of a broken glass.

For what worthless things an irascible and ill-tempered man gives way to his passion when he does not know how to control its first movements. The least fault committed by one who is living in the same house, the silence of one, the loquacity of another, a thoughtless word, a well-meant contradiction on the part of his wife, the crying of his innocent children, the slowness, or precipitation, or awkwardness of his servants, nay, even his own faults, stir up his ill-humor and make him fill the whole house with confusion and discord. Even things that it is out of our power to improve or change, such as inclement weather, a harsh wind, a difficulty in some work or other, a stubborn horse, a howling dog, an ill-tuned instrument, a blunt knife, a bad pen, a cup or glass broken by accident or even by his own fault, and a thousand other similar trifles are capable of making him quite beside himself with anger; so that he begins to curse and swear, and gets in a great passion. Now, is that the way in which a sensible man should act? Are such things

to be deemed a sufficient cause for losing one's temper and often disturbing the whole family?

Oh, some will say, it is easy to call these things trifles; you do not know how things go in our house; I should have as little feeling as a stone if I were to pass them over in silence. When my drunken husband comes home the worse for drink, have I not reason to be angry? When my good-for-nothing, fault-finding wife criticises everything I do, how can I keep my temper? Must I not get angry if my servants do not do what I tell them? Have I not reason to be displeased when I see my children running about the house and doing what they like? When I meet that troublesome neighbor of mine, with whom I have a lawsuit, I should have the patience of Job to be able to control myself. If others did not interfere with me I should be all right; but as things are, I cannot keep my temper. Ah, my dear Christian, you are making a great mistake and deceiving yourself! It is not your husband, nor your wife, nor any one else that is the cause of your giving way to anger: you yourself are to blame especially. Your over-sensitiveness, which does not allow you to bear the least annoyance from others; your obstinacy, which makes you try to have everything according to your own ideas; your imagination, which makes a mountain out of a mole-hill; your suspicious character, which you neither mortify nor restrain; the bad habit you have so long indulged in of giving way to anger at the least provocation; these are the real causes of your ill-humor and anger. If you had learned a little Christian patience and meekness, you would not be at all disturbed by hundreds of such trifles, or, at all events, you would not give such violent and unreasonable expression to your feelings.

And what does the passionate man gain by giving way to his temper? Nothing, but that he makes his temper worse and more difficult to be controlled, causes himself a great deal of pain and annoyance by imagining that people are treating him

unjustly, injures his health and shortens his life; for, according to what physicians say, there is nothing more injurious to health than to give way to anger; and to make himself hateful to the members of his own family and contemptible to all sensible men.

But what should most of all deter one from anger is the fact that thereby God is offended, and his wrath and malediction are incurred on account of the many sins against Christian charity that arise from it. For that unnatural cursing, swearing, and abusive language, quarrelling and fighting, long-continued hatred and enmity, discord and strife, vindictiveness, and sometimes even murder—nay, even blasphemy against the Most High—are all children of anger, and God will not allow them to go unpunished. Therefore, in order to preserve us from those sins, our Lord pronounces this sentence against anger, in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment;" but he who through deliberate anger, "shall say: Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell fire." Therefore, let us do all in our power to avoid such a detestable vice, which is contrary to reason and is the cause of so many sins. "Let all bitterness and anger, and indignation and clamor, and blasphemy, be put away from you, with all malice." But what are we to do in order to check this evil inclination, to which we are all subject?

II. To avoid all anger, two things have to be observed, one by those who have to deal with passionate people, the other by those who are easily excited to anger. The former must be very careful to give the latter no cause for offence, once they know them to be easily excited; they must never dispute with, or contradict them, and they must avoid everything which they know to be a likely cause of anger to them; besides, they must bear with any annoyance which the others cause them, in a spirit of meekness and patience, for God's sake, in order to pre-

serve peace and quiet. But if it is quite evident that the other is determined on getting into a passion, then there is nothing to do but to follow the advice of St. Paul: "Give place to wrath;" that is, let the angry man have his way; keep silent, and let him say and do what he will until his anger is over; go out of his way, out of his sight if possible; do not attempt to excuse yourself, although you are innocent; apologize to him as if he had reason to be vexed with you. This meekness will overcome his anger, and when he comes to himself it will make him admire your virtue, acknowledge his own fault, feel ashamed of himself, and have a greater esteem and love for you. In a word, if there is no one to contradict, there is no occasion for anger and bad temper.

Oh, if all, married people especially, understood this beautiful art and constantly practised it toward each other, what quarrels and discord and misunderstandings, along with the numerous sins that spring from them, would be avoided in families! But, alas! they do not understand it, and therefore neither will give way, neither will remain silent; both strive to have the last word, and of course thus they give rise to the bitterest family quarrels! They are like that married couple who always disagreed on a certain day every year; and do you know why? They once had some roast fowl for dinner, and they differed in opinion as to what kind of birds they were. The husband said they were blackbirds, the wife maintained that they were fieldfares; they had a great dispute about the matter, and at last came to blows. Next year, when the same day came round, the husband said to his wife: Do you remember how foolish we were last year, to fight about the blackbirds? Yes, answered she, and it was your fault; they were fieldfares, not blackbirds. And so they began the dispute again as bad as ever, and repeated it every year when the day came. But do not people act just as foolishly nowadays in many households? One contradicts the other, and neither will give way, in matters that

are not of the least importance, and thus discord and hatred arise, and married life is turned into a regular purgatory, to be followed very often by the eternal pains of hell!

If you find that something suddenly occurs to provoke you to anger, go away, so as not to see it. If you cannot go away, nor otherwise avoid the annoyance, keep perfectly still; do not speak a word; undertake nothing, make no resolution, until your resentment has subsided, because you cannot act prudently while your reason is disturbed by passion. Such was the advice that a certain philosopher gave the emperor Augustus: Whenever you feel inclined to anger, he said, you must repeat the letters of the alphabet from beginning to end, over and over again, until your anger has passed; in that way you will neither do nor say anything that you will have to repent of afterwards. The emperor Theodosius, acting on the advice of St. Ambrose, published a law forbidding any malefactor condemned to death to be executed until thirty days had elapsed after the sentence was pronounced against him. The pious emperor knew well that it would be unjust not to give a poor wretch who was condemned to death by an enraged sovereign any respite until the latter's anger had passed over. It was a remarkable saying that Architas made use of when he returned home from a foreign country, and found that his steward had allowed his property to go to ruin: If I were not angry, said he to the careless steward, I should punish you severely. And in acting thus he showed great wisdom, although he was a heathen, for he knew that while his reason was disturbed by anger he could not inflict just punishment. Christian parents and married people, you should profit by this example. You are bound to chastise your children when they deserve it.

I conclude with the words of David: "Be ye angry and sin not." Be angry and displeased when God is offended, and, if you can, chastise and prevent the sins of others. But if a man has to suffer anything from his neighbor, he must practise char-

ity, patience and meekness. Always remember who it is that causes you annoyance or insults you. Is he a child? Then you must have pity on his youth. He does not know that he is doing wrong. Is it a grown-up person whom you have offended? Why should you be angry with him? You offended him first. Is it some one who insults you through sheer malice? Then you must not be surprised at what he does, nor must you be angry with him, for he has already punished himself by being so wicked. No matter who has injured you, you should not forget that he is your neighbor, that you are bound to love him as yourself, and to return good for evil. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6 : 2); such is the advice that St. Paul gives us, and according to it we must overlook each other's faults and failings. There is no one without faults which sometimes make him troublesome to others, yet these latter must bear those faults with patience. If, then, you are offended, you must think to yourself: I have offended others, or there is something in me which is displeasing to them; they must be patient with me, and of course I must be patient with them. "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (Luke 21 : 19), says Christ. How patient one is with a querulous old man, or a troublesome sick person, or an eccentric and headstrong relative, when he hopes to inherit a large sum of money from him!

Always keep before your eyes our Lord, Jesus Christ. How gentle and patient he was with his disciples while they were still very ignorant! How gentle and patient he was with the greatest sinners! How gentle and patient he was toward those who mocked, scourged, and crucified him! "Who, when he was reviled, did not revile; when he suffered he threatened not, but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly." "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." If these words do not help you to restrain your anger, what can do it? Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE INJURY DONE ONE'S SELF AND GOD BY FINDING FAULT.

"*Thou dost not regard the person of men.*"—Matt. 22 : 16.

What a beautiful encomium that the Scribes and Pharisees passed on our Lord, but how crafty and treacherous was their motive! They thought they would be able to lead our Lord astray, so that to please them he would say that taxes should not be paid to the emperor, and then they could have cried him down as a disturber of the people and a rebel. That was their object in flattering him; "Master," they said, "we know that thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man;" thou fearest neither the enmity of Herod, nor the power of the emperor; "for thou dost not regard the person of men." But with all their cunning they did not succeed, and they had to retire in confusion. Would to God that this praise, which undeniably belongs to our divine Lord, could be given with truth to all men nowadays; so that we could say of every one: "Thou dost not regard the person of men!" But what did they say behind his back? and what do you do? You are friendly to the face of others, but fond of prying into the lives of others; without sufficient grounds you respect and condemn your neighbor. You are fond of speaking of the faults and failings of others, and therefore, by thus interfering with the affairs of others, you act against the love of yourself and the love of God.

I. By thus interfering with the affairs of others, which

do not concern us, we neglect our own souls, and therefore act against the love we owe ourselves.

II. We usurp the right and office of God, and therefore act against the love we owe him.

I. The chief duty that God has imposed on each one of us during this life is to love and serve God, and to be happy with him forever. This is the one necessary thing by which, as Ecclesiastes says, a wise man may be known: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is all man." This is the only affair that concerns every one in particular. This is what we must unceasingly attend to at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. This is the only thing about which each one will be questioned at the judgment-seat of God, as to whether and how he attended to it. "For," as St. Paul says, "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Therefore every one of us shall render account to God for himself." Whether another, who is not under my care, has lived well or ill, served his God faithfully or not, that I shall not have to answer for; but I shall certainly be asked how I lived myself, and how I loved and served my God. Where the soul of my brother is gone, unless I have perverted it and am bound to convert it, that is not the question that will be put to me; if it is lost it will not hinder my salvation; if it is in heaven, it will not prevent my damnation if I deserve it. It is the eternal welfare of my own soul that I must look after; this is the most important and necessary thing that I have to attend to as long as I am on this earth. All other things in the world do not concern me.

And, oh, inquisitive, meddling man, this one necessary thing is the very one that you neglect, when you meddle with the affairs of other people, whom God has not committed to your care. For, while you are engaged in prying into their lives and actions, how can you keep a watchful eye over yourself, so as to regulate your own conduct? As the ancients used to say,

they carry a sack over their shoulders, in the front part of which they have the faults and sins of their neighbor, so that they can always keep them before their eyes and criticise them; but in the back part they have their own faults and sins, so that they cannot see, feel, or notice them, and therefore cannot correct them. "Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye, and behold a beam is in thy own eye?" "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7 : 3-5). Why should it concern you to know and be able to speak of how others live? Have you to answer to God for them? Is there, perhaps, nothing in your own heart and conscience that is worth thinking about and amending? Can you say with St. Paul: "I am not conscious to myself of anything"? It would be rare indeed to find one who could say that. But hear what the Apostle adds: "Yet am I not hereby justified." If the Pharisee, who extolled himself in the temple so much above other men, had looked into his own heart and seen the secret pride and hypocrisy that filled it, he would not have despised nor condemned as a robber and adulterer the public sinner who, filled with humility and sorrow for his sins, stood at the door, and did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven. If the Jews had considered their own sins and vices, which Christ wrote with his finger on the ground, they would not have dared to accuse the woman taken in adultery, nor to condemn her to be stoned. In the same way, if each one of us were to attend properly to the affairs of his soul, no honest man would be troubled by censorious critics.

Nay, they who are so fond of fault-finding show clearly enough that their souls are not in a good state. They give clear proof that they are guilty of the very faults and sins which they think they find in others. "Wherefore," says St. Paul to

the Romans, "thou art inexcusable, oh, man, whosoever thou art, that judgest. For, wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest" (Rom. 2 : 1). So it is with us mortals; we suspect, judge, and speak of others according to our own interior dispositions. We measure our neighbor's shoe by our own last. What wicked thoughts king Saul had of David! He often complained to his attendants that he was in dread of his life on his account, and he even asked David to spare his life. How could Saul have given way to a fear of that kind? For David had always served him truly, had saved him from the hands of the Philistines, and more than once had spared his life when he might have taken it. How was it, then, that Saul had such a bad opinion of him? Because he himself had a violent hatred of the innocent David; and for that reason he thought the latter as wicked as himself. Cain cried out, full of anguish: "Every one, therefore, that findeth me shall kill me." But why? why should they kill you? No one will harm you! But he himself had killed his brother, and therefore he was afraid of every one. Thus people who are fond of meddling with others' affairs are apt to measure them by their own standard. Hence, when they are given to criticising and fault-finding, no matter how good and pious they are in other respects, they have good reason to fear that their own souls are in a bad state; that their lives are not, or have not been good, that their consciences are burdened with many secret faults and vices, and therefore that they condemn themselves as guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others.

"What is it to thee? follow thou me." What have you to do with others? You must follow Christ. Do you wish to gratify your curiosity? If so, I will give you matter enough; you have not to go far to seek it; you need only look at yourself; begin and end with yourself; see how matters are with your own soul and conscience; criticise your own faults and sins; amend

what is still unchristian and imperfect in your own language, behavior, and actions; look after yourself; see that you serve God and love him with your whole heart, above all things, that so you may save your soul. You will find so much to arrange and set in order in this one only thing, which necessarily concerns you, that you will easily forget the faults of your neighbor, which do not concern you, and will leave him in peace. Oh, what a great thing it would be if every one were to live in that way, if every one tried to do his own duty, and left others to attend to theirs! What peace and union there would be in families, what happiness and prosperity everywhere! What a heaven there would be on earth! I am astonished when I consider that marriage feast in the Gospel of St. Matthew. One of the guests present had not on a wedding-garment. "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness." Is it possible, I ask, that none of the guests noticed that the man was not properly clad, and did not warn him to procure a wedding-garment before the king's arrival? No; every one was intent on himself, so that his own garments might be in good order; consequently no one troubled himself about that man, but left him altogether to the king's good pleasure. Let us act in the same way; we are all invited to the heavenly banquet; let each of us endeavor, with all possible diligence, to appear at the end of our lives with the garment of sanctifying grace. We have nothing to do with others; we must leave them to be disposed of according to the good will and pleasure of the King of heaven. And this is the second point in which those prying, inquisitive fault-finders are guilty of sin, for they usurp the right and office that God has reserved to himself, namely, that of examining and judging others.

II. Strange to say, we neglect what we are commanded to do, and devote ourselves thoroughly to what we are forbidden

to interfere with. We have a striking example of this in the person of the high-priest Heli. He had the eye of a lynx to spy out the slightest fault committed by strangers who entered the temple; but he was blind to the great sins which his own sons committed, in his house as well as in the temple. The whole city complained of the conduct of his sons; the people murmured at their impurity and the sacrileges they were guilty of, and spoke of the scandal they gave publicly. But their father was the last to know anything of their wickedness, or to reprove it. Meanwhile he was very sharp in detecting the faults of others. When the pious Anna came into the temple, laboring under a grievous sorrow, he rebuked her at once and accused her of being drunk, "and said to her: How long wilt thou be drunk? Digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken a little too much." How many there are nowadays who resemble him! Tell that father to look after his son; not to allow him to go with bad companions, or to spend his time in drinking and gambling; tell that mother, her daughter spends too much time at the door in the evening, talking to a person of the neighborhood. What is that to me? is the answer you would get; I do not meddle in other people's affairs. What a pious mortal you are, to be sure! You do not meddle in other people's affairs! And why, then, are you so fond of talking of your neighbor's faults to those who cannot help him to amend them, and with no other object but to bring ridicule and dishonor on him? What are his faults to you? But even if I were to make known the faults of another, with a good intention, to his parents or superiors, what better should I be? Mind your own business, is the only answer I should often get; I cannot believe such a thing of my children; they are too good for that; I know well that they mean no wrong. Ah, mind your own business! Why do you not think of that when you spend hours talking of your neighbor's faults? You cannot imagine that your children mean any wrong; you do not be-

lieve they are guilty; you look on them as pious. Why do you not act in the same way when the faults of other people's children are related to you by some backbiting, talkative individual? You are only too ready to believe them, and to join in the uncharitable remarks that are made. We are only too apt to say then that the man is nothing to us; we have nothing to do with him; and yet, when he is not present, and there is not the least hope of doing him any good, we criticise his faults, and make him the subject of injurious suspicions, rash judgments, and uncharitable talk, and we make light of doing so, although it is then really that we should remember that we have not to trouble ourselves about our neighbor's affairs.

For it belongs to God alone to pronounce judgment on others, and we are thus guilty of usurping his office. "But who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?" asks St. James in his Epistle, and who find fault with and condemn his actions? Who has commissioned you to do that? Are you appointed his judge and overseer? No, for the Supreme Judge has forbidden you to usurp that office: "Judge not;" "Look not after wickedness in the house of the just," nor seek for faults in your neighbor. If a stranger came into your house without knocking at the door and entered your room, you would consider him guilty of a great insolence and show him the door at once; and yet you venture, uninvited, into the houses of others—that is, you examine, criticise, and find fault with what is done in them, and speak of it everywhere. Who gave you authority to do that? You usurp an authority that does not belong to you.

Job, although he was the most patient of men, and bore all his trials meekly and silently, blessing God for them, yet, when his inconsiderate friends, not content with reproaching him with his sufferings, began to find fault with his actions, and to attribute the calamities that had befallen him to his sins, he could not restrain himself any longer, and he cried out: "Why do you persecute me as God?" Why do you presume to act

the part of God, and to sit in judgment on me and my actions? Inquisitive and meddlesome fault-finder, do you then wish to make yourself equal to God, as far as his office as Judge is concerned? But what do I say? Equal! You arrogate to yourself even greater authority than God exercises. Christ, although he is the Lord of all created things, and has full power over the present and the future, yet does not pronounce judgment on any one until after death: "And then will he render to every man according to his works." How patiently, meanwhile, he bears with sinners! How careful he is to prevent their misdeeds from being publicly known! How strictly he commands confessors never to make known by the least sign any sin they have heard in confession! But you, presumptuous man, dare to anticipate his judgment, and to pry into, judge, condemn, and talk about the faults of others, while the latter are still on earth, and perhaps, too, even after they have amended those faults, or resolved to amend them.

Woe to you, fault-finders and prying intermeddlers, on that day when your turn shall come to be judged! I would not willingly be in your place then! Not without reason has our Lord, who cannot and will not allow his honor to suffer, threatened in three of the Gospels that as you deal with others, so will he deal with you. You now constitute yourselves judges of others, without any right to do so; but you yourselves will have to appear before a Judge from whom you will not be able to conceal anything. You now discuss and examine, partly through curiosity, partly through envy and malice, the lives of others, and you notice the least fault they commit; "with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." God himself will subject your lives to a strict examination; he will light a lantern, as he says himself, and will search the most hidden recesses of your hearts, nor shall the least fault escape him. You now interpret in a bad sense all you see or hear of others, although you should give them credit

for a good intention, even when their outward acts are inexcusable; "it shall be measured to you again;" God will take no excuse from you, but will pronounce sentence on you, according to the strictness of his justice, and the full weight of your sins. You now speak of your neighbor's faults, and make no secret of anything that you know or suspect to another's disadvantage, and thus you bring ridicule and dishonor on many a one: "it shall be measured to you again;" when the proper time comes, God will not keep silent about you; he will open the Book in which he has the record of all your wickedness, even to your most secret thoughts, and he will read it out, to your unutterable confusion, in presence of the whole world, before heaven and earth, before Angels, men and devils. You now talk ill of and condemn many an honest man behind his back, when he cannot defend himself; "it shall be measured to you again;" God, without asking you about it, will pronounce on you that most severe and irrevocable sentence, without pity or mercy, which condemns the wicked to the flames of hell, and makes them accursed forever. Let others think, judge, talk, and laugh about our faults, as long as they please; our only concern must be to look well to ourselves, and to live as we ought, that we may save our own immortal souls. Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE INJUSTICE OF HUMAN RESPECT.

"*Behold, a certain ruler came up and adored him.*"—Matt. 9 : 18.

He had a right to do so. A beggar must speak submissively to his benefactor, a servant must honor his master, a creature

must reverence his Creator, man must adore his God. How unjust is it to honor a servant more than his master, to respect a beggar more than a king, to love a creature more than the Creator, to adore a man rather than the great and infinite God! And yet that is done by many reasoning beings, who forget God and his law through fear, love, or respect for persons; so that they do what God has forbidden, and neglect what he has commanded. Certainly a disgraceful, shameful thing for a man to do; for

It is a great injustice to God.

You who do evil or omit good through human respect can see how unjust and unbecoming your conduct is. For what things do you weigh in the scales against each other? What things do you compare with each other? On the one side is the Almighty God, on the other a miserable mortal; here is the all-powerful Creator, there a weak creature; here is the Master of all, there a poor slave. God has given you the command: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4 : 10); men, the world, say that you must live according to their ideas and customs. If you hearken to your God, and, laying aside all human respect, resolve to serve him faithfully, you will lose the favor and friendship of the world, and draw down on you its hatred and ridicule; for, generally speaking, they who please God displease the world. "Because you are not of the world," says our Lord to his Apostles, "but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15 : 19). But if you follow the fashion of the world, and please men, you will make God your enemy; for, generally speaking, they who please men displease God; as St. Paul says: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1 : 10). The question for you then to decide is whether you will please God or the world; whether you prefer to have God as your friend, and man as your enemy; or man as your

friend, and God as your enemy. But what an unjust thing it is even to hesitate in a matter of this kind! "Can man be compared with God?" (Job 22 : 2.) One of the greatest insults that Pilate offered the Son of God was, doubtless, when he compared him to Barabbas, and gave the people their choice as to which of the two should be spared. "Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus?" (Matt. 27 : 17.) "Whom will you that I release to you?" Choose whichever you please. Oh, cruel insult!

But if you allow yourselves to be influenced by human respect you may turn this just anger against yourselves; for you are not a whit better than Pilate, inasmuch as you propose to your minds the choice between God and man. "Whom will you?" What shall I do? Shall I offend God, or men? Shall I reject God, or men? "There is no end to the greatness of God" (Ps. 144 : 3). If anything in the world is precious, it is so because God has made it; if anything beautiful, it is because God has adorned it; if anything worthy of love, it is because God has loved it. Why is heaven so full of joys? Because God rules there visibly. Why is the earth so fruitful? Because it is the foot-stool of God. Why is the air so healthy? Because God has given it that virtue. If any one can be called happy in life, he is so because he loves God. Is any one free and in safety, it is because he trusts in God. Is any one cheerful and joyous, it is because he serves God. Is any one wise and prudent, it is because God has enlightened him. Is any one good, if so he has received his goodness from God. It is the greatest honor to be the servant of God, the greatest glory to suffer for him, the highest life to die for him, and endless joy to behold him.

To whom, then, have you likened God? Do you wish to know? This ineffably great God is compared by you to a mortal, that is, to a creature whose origin is nothing as far as his soul is concerned, while his body comes from the slime of the

earth. A mortal who, during life, is no better than dust and ashes, than dried straw, than a withered leaf that is blown about by the wind; a mortal who of himself is nothing, has nothing, knows nothing, can do nothing, save and except sins alone; who passes away like a shadow, or like the grass of the field, that is green in the morning and withers away before evening; who after this life will be turned to dust in the earth; whose father after death will be rottenness and corruption, whose mother, brothers and sisters will be worms; "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms: you are my mother and my sister" (Job 17 : 14). Such is man. Whom now will you choose? Whom will you retain as your friend? The infinite God, or the miserable mortal?

Would that the evil went no further than the mere deliberation! For what choice do we often make? Like the wicked Jews, we cry out: "Not this man, but Barabbas" (John 18 : 40). I will not please God, but men; I will not have the friendship of God, but that of men! We are like the Jews when they cried out to Pilate: "If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend." These few words were like a sharp arrow that pierced the heart of Pilate: "thou art not Cæsar's friend;" they deprived the judge, who, knowing the innocence of Jesus, had hitherto done all he could to save him, of all courage, filled him with mortal terror, and made him deaf to all the claims of justice. Must I no longer be the friend of Cæsar? he thought. If so, then let Christ suffer, so that I may retain Cæsar's friendship. Let innocence be crucified. Let the Son of God die, that I may please my sovereign. Human respect, what wonderful power it has! What the Scribes and Pharisees could not do with their calumnies, nor the high-priests with their law, nor the people themselves with all their clamor, that was at last accomplished by the few words: "thou art not Cæsar's friend." At once, when he heard them, Pilate, against his own judgment and con-

science, pronounced the unjust sentence; "Then therefore he delivered him to them for to be crucified" (John 19 : 16).

What happens in the world nowadays? How many there are who, from childhood, are inclined to virtue and the fear of the Lord! How many who would willingly lead a true Christian, devout, zealous, chaste and just life, because they know that such is the end for which God has created them! How many who would wish to serve God alone, and to love him above all things, because they know that true happiness on this earth is to be found only in his service and love, but who, like Pilate, have yielded to the force of those few words: "If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend," and have become so unnerved by them that they have pronounced a similar unjust sentence! If I do this, I shall forfeit that man's friendship; if I lead a Christian life, and try to please God, what will people say? If I prefer to remain at home in modest seclusion when I am invited out to some party that may be an occasion of sin to me, my choice would be prudent, but "I should not act as a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would call me a recluse, and ridicule me. If in company, or during meal-times, when the honor of the absent is attacked, or impure conversation indulged in, or the faults of others discussed, I refrain from laughing or taking part in such sinful talk, and show how displeased I am at it by my downcast eyes and my obstinate silence, as the law of God requires me to do, "I am not a friend of men." And what will people think of me? They will all condemn me, and accuse me of being conceited. If one to whom I am attached endeavors to persuade me to act against my conscience, and I refuse to do so and express my determination rather to die than to offend God, I should act right indeed, but "I should not be the friend of men," and I should lose that person's esteem and affection. In a word, if, when others sin, I refuse to sin with them, if I am ashamed, where they are shameless, if I serve God when it is displeasing

to them, "I am not their friend." Therefore, away with God, that I may be the friend of men! I renounce the virtues of a Christian life, that I may not displease men! Let, then, the innocent give way to the guilty, the poor to the rich, justice to injustice, modesty to imprudence, chastity to impurity, devotion to impiety, and the service of God to that of men, provided only that I can be the friend of men.

But my uneasy conscience cries out to me, what are you doing? You are offending God. No matter, as long as I succeed in pleasing men! You are losing the inestimable friendship of God. No matter, as long as I can retain the favor of men! You are ruining your soul. I care not, as long as I can please men thereby! What will heaven think of me, and my holy angel guardian, and Mary the Queen of Angels, and Jesus Christ my Saviour, and God my heavenly Father, and all the just in heaven and on earth? Let them think or say what they will; if only men are satisfied with me, if I can only please the common herd, if I can keep the friendship of this or that person, that is all I require. Is not that a far more unjust and wicked sentence and resolution than that of Pilate? The Almighty God, to show how bitterly he complains of it, says: "Be astonished, oh, ye heavens! at this, and ye gates thereof be desolate. For my people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2 : 12, 13).

Yes, they say; but that man can do me a great deal of good; I have already received many benefits from him. Who knows whether I may not be in need of his help again? The mountains, as the saying goes, remain always in the same place, but men can meet each other; therefore I must connive now and then at certain things, so as not to make that man an enemy. Is that so? Has, then, your God done less for you than that man? Have you less to expect from God than from him? Do you require his help more than that of your God? Tell me;

did that man create you, and call you forth out of nothing? Did he give you your soul and body and everything you have? No; God has done all that for you. When you were condemned to hell, did that man redeem you? No; but God redeemed you, and shed his Blood for that purpose. Did that man allow even one of his fingers to be cut off for your sake? The Son of God gave up his whole body to the most cruel tortures for you. His sun gives you light during the day; his moon shines on you during the night; you are warmed by his fire, refreshed by his air, nourished by his bread, and by his help you have been hitherto saved from many dangers, and kept in health and strength. Did that man do anything of the kind for you? Do you hope for anything good? Nay, can you expect the least thing from him? If he gives you anything, must he not first beg it from God? And, after all, what do you imagine he can give you? The outward show of affection, a friendly word that he does not mean in reality, an empty praise which he uses only to conceal the contempt he has for you, for he knows well that it is through cowardice that you fail in doing your duty; or even if his esteem for you is sincere, it is nothing but a mere idea of the mind, a mere fancy of the imagination, and the most you can expect from him on account of it is that he will put in a good word for you here and there, and in so doing will act probably against justice, through human respect, as you did yourself. This is all you have to hope for from him, and when you get that you must be satisfied. And is it for that, that you pay so dearly? Must you therefore give yourself so much trouble and anxiety, and connive at so many things? Must you therefore refrain from saying what you think, from doing what you would wish to do? Must you therefore so miserably barter the grace and favor of God, so as to retain that man's friendship?

But, you say again, if that man cannot do me any good, he can at least do me no harm, unless I make a friend of him. We

must, as the proverb says, howl with the wolves, that they may not tear us to pieces; we must even burn a candle in honor of the devil, that he may not injure us; he who does not know how to humor the world will fare but badly nowadays. This objection is that insult of which Eliphaz, in the person of God, complains in the Book of Job: "Who looked upon the Almighty as if he could do nothing" (Job 22 : 17); and of which David says, bewailing our folly: "They have not called upon the Lord; there have they trembled for fear where there was no fear" (Ps. 13 : 5). We fear one who cannot hurt a hair of our heads unless God permits him, and we do not fear God, whose all-seeing eye and almighty hand no one can escape, who in all places, at all times, has us fully in his power, so that he can annihilate us if he wishes. Where is our Christianity? Nay, where is our reason, since we fear the eyes of men more than the eyes of God? Does not Christ our Saviour say plainly enough: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul"? (Matt. 10 : 28.) "But rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body into hell." Fear him from whose mouth proceeds a two-edged sword, who at this moment can make you a poor beggar and hurl you, body and soul, into eternal flames. Him should you fear, and him alone. And now we have no sword, no want, nor illness, nor pain, nor death held forth to terrify us; the only thing we have to fear is a cross look, a hard word, a mocking laugh, or a refusal to assist us in some necessity that has not yet occurred; and through this fear we lay aside the fear of the Almighty God, and, as the saying goes, burn a candle in honor of men, and adore and pray to them as idols, that they may not harm us; while the honor due to the one true God, and the service he has a right to expect from us, are neglected altogether. In a word, God is disregarded and despised for the sake of pleasing men. "Who looked on the Almighty as if he could do nothing."

But wait; he will tell you himself by-and-by what he can do;

he will let you see how he can injure and benefit you! For a time will come when you will be in extreme necessity, abandoned by all creatures, and then you will call in vain on the friends you have chosen. "And he shall come even to the top thereof, and none shall help him" (Dan. 11 : 45). No one can possibly help him unless God alone; and him you have despised and neglected through human respect. You will call upon him, of course: Oh, my God! help me, take pity on me in my extremity! But he will mock at your sufferings and reject your prayers. "And he shall say: Where are their gods in whom they trusted? Of whose victims they ate the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings; let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress" (Dan. 32 : 37, 38). Where are those whom you honored on earth as gods? "Let them arise and help you." Where are those men whom you have so long fawned on, and served most humbly, while God had to stand aside, neglected and despised? Let them come and help you. Where are those whose cross looks you so dreaded, whose unfriendly words filled you with fear? Let them arise and help you. Where is the man on whose favor and protection you relied? The person for whose sake you have so often neglected God? Where are those from whom you thought you had so much good to hope, so much evil to dread? Go to them; let them, if they can, help you, for I know you not! You were ashamed of my service; go to those whom you considered it an honor to serve.

Oh, Christians, God is infinitely greater than man, infinitely wiser, infinitely more powerful, and an infinitely better and more faithful friend than man! It is from God alone, and not from man, that we have all good to hope, every advantage to expect. It is God alone who can do us real harm, in this life as well as in the next; no man can hurt a hair of our heads without the divine permission. How unjust, then, how foolish it is, to abandon God through human respect, through fear or

love of a mere mortal, and to transgress his commands and renounce his service! Let us, then, serve him alone, freely and openly, as we ought; for we are in this world for the sole purpose of acknowledging him as our God, of loving him with our whole hearts, and of doing his holy will in all things. "Let us therefore displease those to whom Christ is displeasing," to whom God is displeasing, and never let us do what is pleasing to them unless it is pleasing to God. Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE LOQUACIOUS TONGUE.

"*Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.*" —Luke 11 : 28.

Indeed, blessed are they who hear the Word of God in sermons, and keep it in their hearts, and act and live according to it! Blessed are they who learn, know and fulfil the law and the holy will of God. And may we not add: Blessed are they who hear the word of their neighbor, and keep it? they who hear secrets and do not divulge them? For on silence in these matters a great deal depends, and the neglect of it occasions much evil and mischief. But how few are there, even amongst Christians, who deserve to be called blessed on that account! How many talkative people there are who commit even grievous sin by revealing secrets! And of those who unnecessarily reveal secrets I intend to speak to-day, by asking and answering the following three questions:

I. Who are those people?

II. What mischief do they?

III. How grievously do they sin against God and their neighbor?

I. The secrets of a man's heart belong to him more completely than anything else in this world, for, after God, he is the absolute and uncontrolled master of them. He can say that his money belongs to him, yet not in such a way that it cannot be stolen or lost. His house belongs to him; but it may be destroyed by fire. He possesses his good name; but that may be torn to pieces, and he is often compelled to bear patiently the calumnies and backbiting of slanderous and uncharitable tongues. His bodily health, strength, and beauty are subject to countless weaknesses and maladies; his memory and understanding become dulled by age; his sight, hearing, and other senses grow less keen as he advances in life. Any exterior actions that he performs alone and in secret he cannot keep from the knowledge of the Angels and the demons. The secrets of his heart are the only things that belong to him so completely that no creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth can deprive him of them, or make them known against his will. No demon of hell, no angel of heaven can find out our secret thoughts and knowledge, unless the Creator himself reveals them, or unless they can be suspected from outward signs.

This is the knowledge which God, who calls himself "the searcher of hearts," has kept to himself so strictly that he does not reveal the secrets of the human heart even to his dearest friends, or to the Angels, the princes of heaven. And this he does in order to show us how strict is the obligation he places on every one of keeping the secrets entrusted to him, and that, if this obligation is violated, the sin committed is to be attributed to nothing but the wilful, mischievous loquacity of the person who violates it.

And, in fact, the well-being of the human race requires that a strong safeguard should be placed on the hearts and minds of men, and that there should be a strict obligation not to divulge the secrets entrusted to one's keeping. For if we could read each other's thoughts, or if we were allowed to speak freely of the secrets committed to us, what disorder there would be in the world! What would become of mutual confidence and fidelity, of honesty, of Christian charity, of justice, of friendship and intimacy? All these would disappear at once. Hence, the Scripture says: "Open not thy heart to every man, lest he repay thee with an evil turn and speak reproachfully to thee." You must not speak to every one concerning what it would be lawful for you to speak of; how much more, then, are you not bound to keep a strict silence about what you are not allowed to disclose to others? Every one should keep those words of the prophet Isaias constantly before his mind: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself."

Now, what God guards so carefully, what the law of charity and justice and the common weal of the human race require to be kept strictly secret, is published by those talkative people who do not know how to keep their tongues in check. And the chief of these are they who, when they are entrusted with a secret by a well-meaning friend, or are asked in confidence for advice, or have otherwise managed to find out their neighbor's secrets, go and tell what they have heard or learned to the other person concerned. So and so, they say, has said this of you; you think he is a good friend of yours, but you are mistaken; he told me in confidence how he means to act toward you. Or, I happened to find it out by chance; do not let on that you heard anything from me; I could not keep silent any longer about it, and felt obliged to tell you the fearful things that so and so says of you; see that you do not allow him to get the better of you. In the same way they sometimes carry back to the former what the latter has told them. Such tale-bearers and scandal-

mongers have always an evil name in a community, for they sow discord between friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives; and they give rise to secret enmities, hatreds, and envy. People who were formerly on the best of terms refuse to speak to each other, and nourish desires of revenge against each other, without knowing what it was that broke off their friendship so suddenly.

II. There were people of that kind in the court of king Saul, who, instead of trying to mollify him and appease his anger when they saw that he was hostile to David, whom they knew to be innocent, enraged him still more by their calumnies, so that in his passion he tried to put an end to David altogether. Theodore Santabarenus was a tale-bearer, too. Wishing to put the newly-elected emperor Leo out of the way, he went to him and warned him, as a true friend, to be on his guard against his father, and therefore never to go hunting without having a dagger concealed on his person, so as to be able to defend himself in case of attack. The young emperor, suspecting no treachery, followed the advice. Santabarenus then went to the old emperor Basil, and advised him to be on his guard against his son, who was plotting to take away his life, and as a proof of that he would find that Leo carried a dagger concealed about his person when out hunting. The treacherous plan succeeded; the dagger was found, and Basil became so enraged that he immediately commanded that his son's eyes should be put out, and that he should be strangled, a sentence that would have been carried into effect had not Basil's councilors by earnest representations induced him to mitigate the severity of it.

There are plenty of those evil-tongued people to be found everywhere nowadays, who by their tale-bearing cause disunion and enmity between the dearest friends, and the devil might well say to them what he once said to an old hag who created the bitterest hatred between a husband and wife that had for-

merly loved each other dearly: "You are far worse and more mischievous than I and all my associates in hell." What terrible curses are uttered in Holy Scripture against those wicked people! "The whisperer and the double-tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace." Not without reason, then, may we count them amongst the children of Belial; for if it is true that, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God," there is no doubt that they who disturb peace are children of the devil. "Six things there are which the Lord hateth, and the seventh his soul detesteth," and utterly abhors. And what is that? "Him that soweth discord among brethren;" that is, a tale-bearer who creates enmity and strife among others. Would it not be better for one of that character to be dumb than to make such a wicked use of his tongue? Ah, let us carefully avoid all tale-bearing!

What a disgraceful thing that is! The ancient Romans, in making their libations to their idols, used a vessel so constructed that it could not stand upright, and whatever it contained had to be poured out at once. A talkative man is like that vessel; he opens his mouth so often and so wide to talk that whatever is poured in at his ears flows out at once; he cannot keep to himself a single thing he hears, but must tell it immediately. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus we read how the Holy Ghost speaks of such a man: "At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing forth a child;" and again: "As an arrow that sticketh in a man's thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool." He who has an arrow sticking in his body has no rest until it is pulled out. Tie anything to the tail of a cat or a dog, and the animal will run about until it gets rid of it. So the loquacious man, when he has heard a secret, is on thorns until he has told it to some one who will be glad to hear it. In the same chapter we read: "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."

This advice is followed in too literal a sense sometimes by talkative people; that is, they deal with secrets as they would under certain circumstances with one who has just died. Sometimes it happens that when a person is dying his father, or mother, or the priest alone is present; hardly has the breath left him when word is sent to his friends and relatives, the church bell is tolled, and the body is laid out for all the neighbors to see. In the same way a secret dies with those loquacious people; that is, they tell all they know about it at once. What a disgrace it is, I repeat, for a man especially, to have so little control over his tongue! No one will trust him in any important business, nor will people dare to speak of any weighty matter in presence of one who has the reputation of not knowing how to hold his tongue, and of being a betrayer of secrets. What a disgrace that is for a man!

People generally say that it is not safe to trust a secret to a woman, for she will not be able to keep it. I know not whether there are any grounds for that saying, but I must say, in defence of women, that there is, at all events, one fact to prove that they are not all untrustworthy. Laertius tells us of a brave woman at Athens, whose fame has descended to posterity. She knew an important secret that Hippias, the tyrant, was very anxious to hear, and that he tried to worm out of her by every possible means, both personally and by his most skilful councilors; he had recourse to flatteries, caresses, promises, and bribes, but all to no purpose; the brave woman kept her secret with the utmost determination. At last the tyrant lost patience and said to her: I will make you confess all you know; he then ordered the fire and the rack to be prepared in order to extract the secret from her by torture; but the heroic woman said to him: "Do what you will, you will never compel me to say a word of what I cannot disclose without breaking my faith to one who trusted in me;" and thereupon she bit a large piece off her tongue, and spat it into his face; "she spat out her

tongue in the tyrant's face that she might not be forced to let out the secret." The Athenians erected a pillar in her honor, with the inscription: "By her virtue she rose superior to her sex." And nowadays we might well add that the heroic silence of this woman puts many a man to shame, and that, too, in a matter in which every one is bound to act a manly part, and not allow himself to be compelled by fear of torments, or through a spirit of adulation, or through mere talkativeness, to disclose secrets that he is bound as a matter of duty, and often under oath, to keep to himself.

But, I might well say to such people, if you are so fond of hearing your own voices, and find it so hard to hold your tongues, then why do you not speak when duty requires you? Why do you not give your opinion honestly according to conscience and justice? But we might cry out to them as Christ did to the dumb man, at the top of our voices: "Epheta: be thou opened," without getting them to say a word! They are like those dogs that bark at and bite their master's friends, but keep quite still when thieves break into the house. As the prophet Isaias says: "they are dumb dogs, not able to bark;" nor do they dare to do so, although their duty requires it. Therefore, I say again, if you must speak, speak when your duty requires, and hold your tongues when you cannot speak without doing mischief. If public vices and abuses are to be corrected and abolished; if your servants, or children, or wives require chastisement or admonition, in order to urge them to do good, or to abstain from evil, that is the time for you to speak; then you may open your mouths to some purpose. But when you have pledged your word, or your duty and obligation, or the law of God and justice require you to keep a secret, then is the time for you to be silent; then you must say: "my secret for myself, my secret for myself."

In conclusion, I wish you and myself the same benefit that Christ conferred on the dumb man: "And the string of his

tongue was loosed, and he spoke right." Oh, what a beautiful but rare art it is to know how to speak properly at all times! Let us try with all possible diligence to learn it, to keep a guard over the tongue, that dangerous member, from which so much evil and sin proceeds daily, and never to say anything against the honor of God or the charity we owe our neighbor. If we are entrusted with a secret; if we see or hear anything privately of our neighbor, which we ourselves would not wish to be made known if we were the persons concerned, or which might be the cause of mischief; oh, then let us rather, like that heroic woman, bite off our tongues than let the least word fall that might betray the secret! Let us daily beg of God, who alone can govern our tongue: "Set a watch, oh, Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips," that not a word may proceed from us without being first examined to see if it is such as we ought to speak; so that, for the rest of our lives, it may be said of us with truth: "They spoke right." Amen.

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